



# **Jordan Peterson's Bible Lectures**

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## I: Introduction to the Idea of God

Thank you all very much for coming. It's really shocking to me that you don't have anything better to do on a Tuesday night. Seriously though, it's very strange, in some sense, that so many of you are here to listen to a sequence of lectures on the psychological significance of the Bible stories. It's something I've wanted to do for a long time, but it still does surprise me that there's a ready audience for it. That's good. We'll see how it goes.

I'll start with this because it's the right question: why bother doing this? And I don't mean why should I bother—I have my own reasons for doing it—but you might think, why bother with this strange old book at all? That's a good question. It's a contradictory document that's been cobbled together over thousands of years. It's outlasted many, many kingdoms. It's really interesting that it turns out a book is more durable than stone. It's more durable than a castle. It's more durable than an empire. It's really interesting that something so evanescent can be so long-living. So there's that; that's kind of a mystery.

I'm approaching this whole scenario, the Biblical stories, as if they're a mystery, fundamentally because they are. There's a lot we don't understand about them. We don't understand how they came about. We don't really understand how they were put together. We don't understand why they had such an unbelievable impact on civilization. We don't understand how people could have believed them. We don't understand what it means that we don't believe them now or even what it would mean if we did believe them. On top of all that, there's the additional problem—which isn't specific to me but is certainly relevant to me—that, no matter how educated you are, you're not educated enough to discuss the psychological significance of the Biblical stories. But I'm going to do my best, partly because I want to learn more about them. One of the things I've learned is that one of the best ways to learn about something is to talk about it. When I'm lecturing, I'm thinking. I'm not trying to tell you what I know for sure to be the case, because there's lots of things that I don't know for sure to be the case. I'm trying to make sense out of this, and I have been doing this for a long time.

You may know, you may not, that I'm an admirer of [Nietzsche](#). Nietzsche was a devastating critic of dogmatic Christianity—Christianity as it was instantiated in institutions. Although, he is a very paradoxical thinker. One of the things Nietzsche said was that he didn't believe the scientific revolution would have

ever got off the ground if it hadn't been for Christianity and, more specifically, for Catholicism. He believed that, over the course of a thousand years, the European mind had to train itself to interpret everything that was known within a single coherent framework—coherent if you accept the initial [axioms](#). Nietzsche believed that the Catholicization of the phenomena of life and history produced the kind of mind that was then capable of transcending its dogmatic foundations and concentrating on something else. In this particular case it happened to be the natural world.

Nietzsche believed that Christianity died of its own hand, and that it spent a very long time trying to attune people to the necessity of the truth, absent the corruption and all that—that's always part of any human endeavour. The truth, the spirit of truth, that was developed by Christianity turned on the roots of Christianity. Everyone woke up and said, or thought, something like, how is it that we came to believe any of this? It's like waking up one day and noting that you really don't know why you put a Christmas tree up, but you've been doing it for a long time and that's what people do. There are reasons Christmas trees came about. The ritual lasts long after the reasons have been forgotten.

Nietzsche was a critic of Christianity and also a champion of its disciplinary capacity. The other thing that Nietzsche believed was that it was not possible to be free unless you had been a slave. By that he meant that you don't go from childhood to full-fledged adult individuality; you go from child to a state of discipline, which you might think is akin to self-imposed slavery. That would be the best scenario, where you have to discipline yourself to become something specific before you might be able to regain the generality you had as a child. He believed that Christianity had played that role for Western civilization. But, in the late 1800s, he announced that God was dead. You often hear of that as something triumphant but for Nietzsche it wasn't. He was too nuanced a thinker to be that simpleminded. Nietzsche understood—and this is something I'm going to try to make clear—that there's a very large amount that we don't know about the structure of experience, that we don't know about reality, and we have our articulated representations of the world. Outside of that there are things we know absolutely nothing about. There's a buffer between them, and those are things we sort of know something about. But we don't know them in an articulated way.

Here's an example: You're arguing with someone close to you, and they're in a bad mood. They're being touchy and unreasonable. You keep the conversation up and maybe all of a sudden they'd get angry, or maybe they cry. When they

up and maybe all of a sudden they get angry, or maybe they cry. When they cry, they figure out what they're angry about. It has nothing to do with you, even though you might have been what precipitated the argument. That's an interesting phenomena, as far as I'm concerned, because it means that people can know things at one level without being able to speak what they know at another. In some sense, the thoughts rise up from the body. They do that in moods; they do that in images, and they do that in actions. We have all sorts of ways that we understand before we understand in a fully articulated manner.

We have this articulated space that we can all discuss. Outside of that we have something that's more akin to a dream that we're embedded in. It's an emotional dream that we're embedded in, and that's based, at least in part, on our actions. I'll describe that later. What's outside of that is what we don't know anything about at all. The dream is where the mystics and artists live. They're the mediators between the absolutely unknown and the things we know for sure. What that means is that what we know is established on a form of knowledge that we don't really understand. If those two things are out of sync—if our articulated knowledge is out of sync with our dream—then we become dissociated internally. We think things we don't act out and we act out things we don't dream. That produces a kind of sickness of the spirit. Its cure is something like an integrated system of belief and representation.

People turn to things like ideologies, which I regard as parasites on an underlying religious substructure, to try to organize their thinking. That's a catastrophe and what Nietzsche foresaw. He knew that, when we knocked the slats out of the base of Western civilization by destroying this representation, this God ideal, we would destabilize and move back and forth violently between nihilism and the extremes of ideology. He was particularly concerned about radical left ideology and believed—and predicted this in the late 1800s, which is really an absolute intellectual tour de force of staggering magnitude—that in the 20th century hundreds of millions of people would die because of the replacement of these underlying dream-like structures with this rational, but deeply incorrect, representation of the world. We've been oscillating back and forth between left and right ever since, with some good sprinkling of nihilism and despair. In some sense, that's the situation of the modern Western person, and increasingly of people in general.

I think part of the reason that Islam has its back up with regards to the West to such a degree—there's many reasons and not all of them are valid, that's for sure—is that, being still grounded in a dream, they can see that the rootless,

questioning mind of the West poses a tremendous danger to the integrity of their culture, and it does. Westerners, us, we undermine ourselves all the time with our searching intellect. I'm not complaining about that. There isn't anything easy that can be done about it. But it's still a sort of fruitful catastrophe, and it has real effects on people's lives. It's not some abstract thing. Lots of times when I've been treating people with depression, for example, or anxiety, they have existential issues. It's not just some psychiatric condition. It's not just that they're tapped off of normal because their brain chemistry is faulty, although sometimes that happens to be the case. It's that they are overwhelmed by the suffering and complexity of their life and they're not sure why it's reasonable to continue with it. They can feel the terrible, negative meanings of life but are sceptical beyond belief about any of the positive meanings of it.

I had one client who's a very brilliant artist. As long as he didn't think, he was fine. He'd go and create, and he was really good at being an artist. He had that personality that was continually creating and quite brilliant, although he was self-denigrating. But he sawed the branch off that he was sitting on as soon as he started to think about what he was doing. He'd start to criticize what he was doing, the utility of it, even though it was self-evidently useful. Then it would be very, very hard for him to even motivate himself to create. He always struck me as a good example of the consequences of having your rational intellect divorced in some way from your being—divorced enough so that it actually questions the utility of your being. It's not a good thing.

It's really not a good thing because it manifests itself not only in individual psychopathologies, but also in social psychopathologies. That's this proclivity of people to get tangled up in ideologies, and I really do think of them as crippled religions. That's the right way to think about them. They're like religion that's missing an arm and a leg but can still hobble along. It provides a certain amount of security and group identity, but it's warped and twisted and demented and bent, and it's a parasite on something underlying that's rich and true. That's how it looks to me, anyways. I think it's very important that we sort out this problem. I think that there isn't anything more important that needs to be done than that. I've thought that for a long, long time, probably since the early '80s when I started looking at the role that belief systems played in regulating psychological and social health. You can tell that they do that because of how upset people get if you challenge their belief systems. Why the hell do they care, exactly? What difference does it make if all of your ideological axioms are 100 percent correct?

People get unbelievable upset when you poke them in the axioms, so to speak

People get unbelievably upset when you poke them in the axioms, so to speak, and it is not by any stretch of the imagination obvious why. There's a fundamental truth that they're standing on. It's like they're on a raft in the middle of the ocean. You're starting to pull out the logs, and they're afraid they're going to fall in and drown. Drown in what? What are the logs protecting them from? Why are they so afraid to move beyond the confines of the ideological system? These are not obvious things. I've been trying to puzzle that out for a very long time. I've done some lectures about that that are on YouTube. Most of you know that. Some of what I'm going to talk about in this series you'll have heard if you've listened to the YouTube videos, but I'm trying to hit it from different angles.

Nietzsche's idea was that human beings were going to have to create their own values. He understood that we had bodies and that we had motivations and emotions. He was a romantic thinker, in some sense, but way ahead of his time. He knew that our capacity to think wasn't some free-floating soul but was embedded in our physiology, constrained by our emotions, shaped by our motivations, shaped by our body. He understood that. But he still believed that the only possible way out of the problem would be for human beings themselves to become something akin to God and to create their own values. He talked about the person who created their own values as the overman, or the superman. That was one part of the Nietzschean philosophy that the Nazis took out of context and used to fuel their superior man ideology. We know what happened with that. That didn't seem to turn out very well, that's for sure.

I also spent a lot of time reading [Carl Jung](#). It was through Jung, and also [Jean Piaget](#), a developmental psychologist, that I started to understand that our articulated systems of thought are embedded in something like a dream. That dream is informed in a complex way by the way we act. We act out things we don't understand all the time. If that wasn't the case, we wouldn't need a psychology, or sociology, or anthropology, or any of that, because we'd be completely transparent to ourselves, and we're clearly not. We're much more complicated than we understand, which means that the way that we behave contains way more information than we know.

Part of the dream that surrounds our articulated knowledge is extracted as a consequence of us watching each other behave and telling stories about it for thousands and thousands and thousands of years, extracting out patterns of behaviour that characterize humanity and trying to represent—partly through imitation, but also drama, mythology, literature, art, and all of that—what we're



like so that we can understand what we're like. That process of understanding is what I see unfolding, at least in part, in the Biblical stories. It's halting, partial, awkward, and contradictory, which is one of things that makes the book so complex. But I see in that the struggle of humanity to rise above its animal forebears and become conscious of what it means to be human.

That's a very difficult thing, because we don't know who we are, or what we are, or where we came from. Life is an unbroken chain going back 3.5 billion years. It's an absolutely unbelievable thing. Every single one of your ancestors reproduced successfully for 3.5 billion years. It's absolutely unbelievable. We rose out of the dirt and the muck, and here we are, conscious but not knowing, and we're trying to figure out who we are. A set of stories that we've been telling for 3,000 years seems, to me, to have something to offer.

When I look at the stories in the Bible, I do it, in some sense, with a beginner's mind. It's a mystery, this book: how the hell it was made, why it was made, why we preserved it, why it happened to motivate an entire culture for 2,000 years and to transform the world. What's going on? How did that happen? It's by no means obvious. One of the things that bothers me about casual critics of religion is that they don't take the phenomena seriously. It's a serious phenomena, not least because people have the capacity for religious experience, and no one knows why that is. You can induce it reliably in all sorts of different ways. You could do it with brain stimulation. You can certainly do it with drugs, especially the psychedelic variety. They produce intimations of the divine extraordinarily regularly. People have been using drugs like that for God only knows how long—50,000 years, maybe more than that—to produce some sort of intimate union with the divine. We don't understand any of that. When we discovered the psychedelics in the late '60s, it shocked everybody so badly that they were instantly made illegal and abandoned in terms of research for like 50 years, and it's no wonder, because who the hell expected that? Nobody.

Jung was a student of Nietzsche's, and he was also a very astute critic of Nietzsche. He was educated by [Freud](#). Freud started to collate the information that we had pertaining to the notion that people lived inside a dream. It was Freud that really popularized the idea of the unconscious mind. We take this for granted to such a degree today that we don't understand how revolutionary the idea was. What's happened with Freud is that we've taken all the marrow out of his bones and left the husk behind. Now when we think about Freud we just think about the husk, because that's everything that's been discarded, but so

much of what he discovered is part of our popular conception now, including the idea that your perceptions, your actions, and your thoughts are all informed and shaped by unconscious motivations that are not part of your voluntary control.

That's a very, very strange thing. It's one of the most unsettling things about the psychoanalytic theories. The psychoanalytic theories are something like, you're a loose collection of living subpersonalities, each with its own set of motivations, perceptions, emotions, and rationals, and you have limited control over that. You're like a plurality of internal personalities that's loosely linked into a unity. You know that, because you can't control yourself very well, which is one of Jung's objections to Nietzsche's idea that we can create our own values.

Jung didn't believe that, especially not after interacting with Freud, because he saw that human beings were deeply, deeply affected by things that were beyond their conscious control. No one really knows how to conceptualize those things. The cognitive psychologists think of them as computational machines. The ancient people thought of them as Gods, although it's more complicated than that. [Mars](#) would be the God of rage; that's the thing that possesses you when you're angry. It has a viewpoint, and it says what it wants to say, and that might have very little to do with what you want to say when you're being sensible. It doesn't just inhabit you: it inhabits everyone, and it lives forever, and it even inhabits animals. It's this transcendent, psychological entity that inhabits the body politic like a thought inhabits the brain. That's one way of thinking about it. It's a very strange way of thinking, but it certainly has its merits. Those things, in some sense, are deities. But it's not that simple.

Jung got very interested in dreams, and he started to understand the relationship between dreams and myths. He was deeply read in mythology, and he would see in his client's dreams echoes of stories that he knew. He started to believe that the dream was the birthplace of the myth and that there was a continual interaction between the two processes: the dream and the story, and storytelling. You can tell your dreams as stories when you remember them, and some people remember dreams all the time, two or three at night. I've had clients like that. They often have archetypal dreams that have very clear mythological structures. I think that's more the case with people who are creative, especially if they're a bit unstable at the time, because the dream tends to occupy the space of uncertainty and to concentrate on fleshing out the unknown reality before you get a real grip on it. So the dream is the birthplace of thinking. That's a good way of thinking about it, because it's not that clear. It's doing its best to formulate something. That was Jung's notion as of post-Freud, who believed that

formulate something. That was Jung's notion as of post-Freud, who believed that there were internal censors that were hiding the dream's true message. That's not what Jung believed. He believed the dream was doing its best to express a reality that was still outside of fully articulated, conscious comprehension.

A thought appears in your head, right? That's obvious. Bang, it's nothing you ever asked about. What the hell does that mean? A thought appears in your head. What kind of ridiculous explanation is that? It just doesn't help with anything. Where does it come from? Well, nowhere, it just appears in my head. That's not a very sophisticated explanation, as it turns out. You might think that those thoughts that you think...Well, where do they come from? They're often someone else's thoughts, someone long dead. That might be part of it, just like the words you use to think are utterances of people who have been long dead. You're informed by the spirit of your ancestors, that's one way of looking at it.

Your motivations speak to; your emotions speak to you; your body speaks to you, and it does all that, at least in part, through the dream. The dream is the birthplace of the fully articulated idea. They don't just come from nowhere fully-fledged. They have a developmental origin, and God only knows how lengthy that origin is. Even to say I am conscious...chimpanzees don't say that. It's been something like seven million years since we broke from chimpanzees, from the common ancestor. They have no articulated knowledge, very little self-representation, very little self-consciousness, and that's not the case with us, at all. We had to painstakingly figure all of this out during that seven million year voyage. I think some of that's represented and captured in these ancient stories, especially the oldest stories in [Genesis](#), which are the stories we're going to start with. Some of the archaic nature of the human being is encapsulated in those stories. It's very, very instructive, as far as I can tell.

I'll give you just a quick example. There's an idea of sacrifice in the Old Testament, and it's pretty barbaric. The story of Abraham and Isaac is a good example. Abraham was called on to actually sacrifice his own son, which doesn't really seem like something that a reasonable God would ask you to do. God, in the Old Testament, is frequently cruel, arbitrary, demanding, and paradoxical, which is one of the things that really gives the book life. It wasn't edited by a committee that was concerned with not offending anyone, that's for sure.

So Jung believed that the dream was the birthplace of thought. I've been extending that idea, because one of the things I wondered about deeply—you

have a dream and then someone interprets it. You can argue about whether or not an interpretation is valid, just like you can argue about whether your interpretation of a novel or a movie is valid. It's a very difficult thing to determine with any degree of accuracy, which accounts, in part, for the [postmodern](#) critique. But my observation has been that people will present a dream and, sometimes, we can extract out real, useful information from it that the person didn't appear to know, and they get a flash of insight. That's a marker that we stumbled on something that unites part of that person that wasn't united before. It pulls things together, which is often what a good story will do, or sometimes a good theory. Things snap together for you, and a little light goes on. That's one of the markers that I've used for accuracy and dreams in my own family.

When I was first married, I'd have fights with my wife, arguments about this and that. I'm fairly hot-headed, and I'd get all puffed up and agitated about whatever we were arguing about. She'd go to sleep, which was really annoying. It was so annoying because I couldn't sleep. I'd be chewing off my fingernails, and she'd be sleeping peacefully beside me. Maddening. But, often, she'd have a dream, and she'd discuss it with me the next morning. We'd unravel what was at the bottom of our argument. That was unbelievably useful, even though it was extraordinary aggravating. I was convinced by Jung. His ideas about the relationship between dreams, mythology, drama, and literature made sense to me, and his ideas about the relationship between man and art.

I know this Native carver; he's a [Kwakwaka'wakw](#) guy. He's carved a bunch of wooden sculptures, totem poles, and masks that I have in my house. He's a very interesting person, not particularly literate, and really still steep in this ancient, 13,000-year-old tradition. He's an original language speaker, and the fact that he isn't literate has sort of left him with the mind of someone who is pre-literature. Pre-literature people aren't stupid; they just aren't literate. Their brains are organized differently in many ways.

I've asked him about his intuition for his carvings, and he's told me that he dreams. You've seen the [Haida](#) masks; you know what they look like. His people are closely related to the Haida; it's the same kind of style. He dreams in those animals and can remember his dreams. He also talks to his grandparents, who taught him how to carve, in his dreams. Quite often, if he runs into a problem with carving, his grandparents will come, and he'll talk to them. He sees the creatures that he's going to carve, living, in an animated sense, in his

imagination. I have no reason to disbelieve him. He's a very, very straightforward person, and he doesn't have the motivation, or the guile, I would say, to invent a story like that. There's just no reason he would possibly do it. I don't think he's told that many people about it. He thinks it's kind of crazy. When he was a kid, he thought he was insane because he'd had those dreams all the time about these creatures and so forth. It wasn't something he was trumpeting.

I've found it fascinating because I can see in him part of the manifestation of this unbroken tradition. We have no idea how traditions like that are really passed on for thousands and thousands of years. Part of it is oral and memory, part of it's acted out and dramatized, and part of it's going to be imaginative. People who aren't literate store information quite differently than we do. We don't remember anything; it's all written down in books. But if you're from an oral culture, especially if you're trained in that way, you have all of that information at hand. It's so that you can speak it. You can tell the stories, and you really know them. Modern people really don't know what that's like anymore. I doubt there's more than maybe two of you in the audience that could spout from memory a 30-line poem. Poetry was written so that people could do that. That's why we have that form, so that people could remember it and have it with them. But we don't do any of that anymore.

Anyways, back to Jung. Jung was a great believer in the dream. I know that dreams will tell you things that you don't know. Well, how the hell can that be? How in the world can something you think up tell you something you don't know? How does that make any sense? First of all, why don't you understand it? Why does it have to come forth in the form of the dream? It's like something's going on inside you that you don't control. The dream happens to you just like life happens to you. There is the odd lucid dreamer who can apply a certain amount of conscious control, but most of the time you're laying there asleep and this crazy, complicated world manifests itself inside you and you don't know how. You can't do it when you're awake, and you don't know what it means. It's like, what the hell's going on?

That's one of the things that's so damn frightening about the psychoanalysts—you get this both from Freud and Jung. You really start to understand that there are things inside you that control you, instead of the other way around. You can use a bit of reciprocal control, but there's manifestations of spirits, so to speak, inside you that determine the manner in which you walk through life, and you don't control it. And what does? Is it random? There are people who have

don't control it. And what does? Is it random? There are people who have claimed that dreams are merely the consequence of random neural firing, which is a theory that I think is absolutely absurd because there's nothing random about dreams. They are very, very structured and very, very complex. They're not like snow on a television screen or static on a radio. I've also seen, so often, that people have very coherent dreams that have a perfect narrative structure. They're fully developed, in some sense. So that theory doesn't go anywhere with me. I just can't see that as useful at all. I'm more likely to take the phenomena seriously.

There's something to dreams. You dream of the future, then you try to make it into reality. That seems to be an important thing. Or maybe you dream up a nightmare and try to make that into a reality, because people do that, too, if they're hellbent on revenge, for example, and full of hatred and resentment. That manifests itself in terrible fantasies. Those are dreams, then people go act them out. These things are powerful, and whole nations can get caught up in collective dreams. That's what happened to Nazi Germany in the 1930s. It was an absolutely remarkable, amazing, horrific, destructive spectacle. The same thing happened in the Soviet Union, and the same thing happened in China. You have to take these things seriously. You try to understand what's going on.

Jung believed that the dream could contain more information than was yet articulated. I think artists do the same thing. People go to museums and look at paintings—renaissance paintings or modern paintings—and they don't exactly know why they are there. I was in this room in New York that was full of renaissance art—great painters, the greatest painters. I thought maybe that room was worth a billion dollars or something outrageous, because there was like 20 paintings in there, priceless. The first thing is, why are those painting worth so much? And why is there a museum in the biggest city in the world devoted to them? Why do people from all over the world come and look at them? What the hell are those people doing? One of them was of the [Assumption of Mary](#)—beautifully painted, absolutely glowing work of art, and like 20 people standing in front of it and looking at it. What are those people up to? They don't know. Why did they make a pilgrimage to New York to come and look at that painting? It's not like they know. Why is it worth so much? I know there's a status element to it but that begs the question, why do those items become such high-status items? What is it about them that's so absolutely remarkable? We're strange creatures.

Where does the information that's in the dream come from? It has to come from

somewhere. You could think of it as a revelation, because it's like it springs out of the void and it's new knowledge. You didn't produce it; it just appears. I'm scientifically minded, and I'm quite a rational person. I like to have an explanation of things that's rational and empirical before I look for any other kind of explanation. I don't want to say that everything that's associated with divinity can be reduced, in some manner, to biology, an evolutionary history, or anything like that, but, insofar as it's possible to do that reduction, I'm going to do that. I'm going to leave the other phenomena floating in the air because they can't be pinned down. In that category I would put the category of mystical or religious experience, which we don't understand at all. Artists observe one another, and they observe people. Then they represent what they see and transmit the message of what they see to us. That teaches us to see. We don't necessarily know what it is that we're learning from them, but we're learning something, or at least we're acting like we're learning something. We go to movies; we watch stories; we immerse ourselves in fiction, constantly. That's an artistic production and, for many people, the world of the arts is a living world. That's particularly true if you're a creative person.

It's the creative, artistic people that move the knowledge of humanity forward. They do that with their artistic productions first. They're on the edge. The dancers, poets, visual artists, and musicians do that, and we're not sure what they're doing. We're not sure what musicians are doing. What the hell are they doing? Why do you like music? It gives you deep intimations of the significance of things, and no one questions it. You go to a concert; you're thrilled. It's a quasi-religious experience, particularly if the people really get themselves together and get the crowd moving. There's something incredibly intense about it, but it makes no sense whatsoever. It's not an easy thing to understand. Music is deeply patterned and patterned in layers. I think that has something to do with it, because reality is deeply patterned in layers. I think music is representing reality in some fundamental way. We get into the sway of that and participate in being. That's part of what makes it such an uplifting experience but we don't really know that's what we're doing. We just go do it, and it's nourishing for people. Young people in particular, lots of them live for music. It's where they derive all their meaning, their cultural identity. Everything that's nourishing comes from their affiliation with their music. That's an amazing thing.

The question still remains, where does the information in dreams come from? I think where it comes from is that we watch the patterns that everyone acts out. We watch that forever, and we've got some representations of those patterns that's part of our cultural history. That's what's embedded in fictional accounts

that's part of our cultural history. That's what's embedded in fictional accounts of stories between good and evil, the bad guy and the good guy, and the romance. These are canonical patterns of being for people, and they deeply affect us, because they represent what it is that we will act out in the world. We flesh that out with the individual information we have about ourselves and other people. There's waves of behavioural patterns that manifest themselves in the crowd across time. Great dramas are played on the crowd across time. The artists watch that and get intimations of what that is. They write it down, tell us, and we're a little clearer about what we're up to.

A great dramatist like Shakespeare, we know that what he wrote is fiction. Then we say, fiction isn't true. But then you think, well, wait a minute. Maybe it's true like numbers are true. Numbers are an abstraction from the underlying reality, but no one in their right mind would really think that numbers aren't true. You could even make a case that the numbers are more real than the things that they represent, because the abstraction is so insanely powerful. Once you have mathematics you're just deadly. You can move the world with mathematics. It's not obvious that the abstraction is less real than the more concrete reality. You take a work of fiction like Hamlet and you think, well, it's not true because it's fiction. But then you think, wait a minute, what kind of explanation is that? Maybe it's more true than nonfiction. It takes the story that needs to be told about you, and the story that needs to be told about you, and you, and you, and you, and you, and it abstracts that out and says look, here's something that's a key part of the human experience as such. It's an abstraction from this underlying noisy substrate. People are affected by it because they see that the thing that's represented is part of the pattern of their being. That's the right way to think about it.

With these old stories, these ancient stories, it seems to me like that process has been occurring for thousands of years. It's like we watched ourselves and we extracted out some stories. We imitated each other, and we represented that in drama, and then we distilled the drama, and we got a representation of the distillation, and then we did it again, and at the end of that process—it took God only knows how long. They've traced some fairy tales back 10,000 years in relatively unchanged form. It certainly seems to me that the archaeological evidence, for example, suggests that the really old stories that the Bible begins with are at least that old and likely embedded in prehistory that's far older than that. You might say, well, how can you be so sure? And the answer to that, in part, is that the ancient cultures didn't change fast. They stayed the same; that's the answer. They keep their information moving from generation to generation.



That's how they stay the same, and that's how we know. There are archaeological records of rituals that have remained relatively unbroken for up to 20,000 years. It was discovered in caves in Japan that were set up for a particular kind of bear worship that was also characteristic of Western Europe. So these things can last for very long periods of time.

We're watching each other act in the world and then the question is, how long have we been watching each other? The answer to that, in some sense, is as long as there have been creatures with nervous systems, and that's a long time. That's some hundreds of millions of years, perhaps longer than that. We've been watching each other, trying to figure out what we're up to, across that entire span of time. Some of that knowledge is built right into your bodies, which is why we can dance with each other, for example. Understanding isn't just something that you have as an abstraction; it's something that you act out. That's what children are doing when they're learning to rough-and-tumble play. They're learning to integrate their body with the body of someone else in a harmonious way, learning to cooperate and compete, and that's all instantiated right into their body. It's not abstract knowledge, and they don't know that they're doing that. They're just doing it. We can even use our body as a representational platform.

We've been studying each other for a long time, abstracting out what is it that we're up to, what should we be up to. That's an even more fundamental question. If you're going to live in the world and you're going to do it properly, what does properly mean? How is it that you might go about that? It's the right question; it's what everyone wants to know. How do you live in the world? It's not what the world is made of; it's not the same question. How do you live in the world? It's the eternal question of human beings. I guess we're the only species that has ever really asked that question. All the other animals just go and do whatever it is they do. Not us. It's a question for us. We have to become aware of it. We have to speak it, God only knows why. But that seems to be the situation. So we act, that acting is shaped by the world and society into something that we don't understand but that we can model. We model it in our stories and with our bodies, and that's where the dream gets its information. The dream is part of the process that's watching everything and then trying to formulate it. It's trying to get the signal out from the noise and portray it in dramatic form, because the dream is a little drama. And then you get the chance to talk about what that dream is. You have something like articulated knowledge at that point.

I would say the Bible exists in that space that is half into the dream and half into articulated knowledge. Going into it to find out what the stories are about can aid our self-understanding. The other issue is that if Nietzsche was correct, and if Jung was correct, and [Dostoevsky](#) as well...without the cornerstone that that understanding provides, we're lost. That's not good because then we're susceptible to psychological pathology. People that are adamant anti-religious thinkers seem to believe that if we abandoned our immersion in the underlying dream that we'd all instantly become rationalists like [Descartes](#) or [Bacon](#)—intelligent, clear thinking, rational, scientific people. I don't believe that for a moment. I don't think there's any evidence for it. I think we would become so irrational, so rapidly, that the weirdest mysteries of Catholicism would seem positively rational by contrast, and I think that's already happening.

You have the unknown world. That's just what you don't know at all. That's outside the ocean that surrounds the island that you inhabit, something like that. It's chaos itself. You act in that world, and you act in ways that you don't understand. There's more to your actions than you can understand. One of the things that Jung said—I loved this when I first understood it. He says everybody acts out a myth, but very few people know what their myth is. You should know what your myth is, because it might be a tragedy, and maybe you don't want it to be. That's really worth thinking about because you have a pattern of behaviour that characterizes you. God only knows where you got it. Partly it's biological, partly it's from your parents. It's your unconscious assumptions. It's the way the philosophy of your society has shaped you, and it's aiming you somewhere. Is it aiming you somewhere you want to go? That's a good question; that's part of self-realization.

We know we don't understand our actions. Almost every argument you have with someone is about that. It's like, why did you do that? You come up with some half-baked reasons why you did it; you're flailing around in the darkness; you try to give an account for yourself but you can only do it partially. It's very, very difficult, because you're a complicated animal with the beginnings of an articulated mind, and you're just way more than you can handle. So you act things out, and that's a kind of competence. Then you imagine what you act out, and you imagine what everyone else acts out. There's a tremendous amount of information in your action, and that information is translated up into the dream and then into art, mythology and literature. There's a tremendous amount of information in that, and some of that is translated into articulated thought.

I'll give you a quick example of something like that. I think this is partly what

I'll give you a quick example of something like that. I think this is partly what happens in Exodus, when Moses comes up with the law. He's wandering around with the Israelites forever in the desert. They're going left and going right and worshipping idols and having a hell of a time, getting rebellious. Moses goes up in the mountain, and he has this tremendous revelation in the sight of God. It illuminates him, and he comes down with the law. Moses acted as a judge—I know this is a mythological story—in the desert, and he was continually mediating between people who were having problems, constantly trying to keep peace. What are you doing when you're trying to keep peace? You're trying to understand what peace is. You have to apply the principles. What are the principles? Well, you don't know. The principles are whatever satisfied the people enough to make peace. Maybe you do that 10,000 times and then you get some sense of the principles that bring peace. One day it blasts into your consciousness like a revelation. Here's the rules that we're already acting out. That's the Ten Commandments. They were there to begin with. Moses comes forward and says look, this is basically what we're already doing, but now it's codified. That's all historical process condensed into a single story, but obviously that happened because we have written law. In good legal systems, that emerges from the bottom up. English common law is exactly like that: it's single decisions that are predicated on principles that are then articulated and made into the body of law.

The body of law is something that you act out; that's why it's a body of law. That's why, if you're a good citizen, you act out the body of law. The body of law has principles. Ok, so the question is, what are the principles that guide our behaviour? Well, that's something like what the archaic Israelites meant by God. It's not a good enough explanation, but imagine that you are a chimpanzee and you have a powerful dominant figure at the pinnacle of your society. That represents power—more than that, because it's not sheer physical prowess that keeps a chimp at the top of the hierarchy. It's much more complicated than that. You could say there's a principle that the dominant person manifests, and then you might say that principle shines forth even more brightly if you know 10 people who are dominant and powerful. Then you could extract out what dominance means from that. You can extract what power means from that, and then you can divorce the concept from the people. We had to do that, at some point, because we can say power in the human context, and we can imagine what that means, but it's divorced from any specific manifestation of power. How the hell did we do that? That's so complicated. If you're a chimp, the power is in another chimp. It's not some damn abstraction.

Think about it. We're in these hierarchies, many of them across centuries. We're trying to figure out what the guiding principle is. We're trying to extract out the core of the guiding principles, and we turn that into a representation of a pattern of being. That's God. It's an abstracted ideal, and it manifests itself in personified form. That's ok, because what we're trying to get at is, in some sense, the essence of what it means to be a properly functioning, properly social, and properly competent individual. We're trying to figure out what that means. You need an embodiment. You need an ideal that's abstracted, that you could act out, that would enable you to understand what that means. That's what we've been driving at. That's the first hypothesis.

I'm going to go over some of the attributes of this abstracted ideal that we've formalized as God, but that's the first hypothesis: a philosophical or moral ideal manifests itself first as a concrete pattern of behavior that's characteristic of a single individual. And then it's a set of individuals, and then it's an abstraction from that set, and then you have the abstraction, and it's so important. Here's a political implication: One of the debates, we might say, between early Christianity and the late Roman Empire was whether or not an emperor could be God, literally to be deified and put into a temple. You can see why that might happen because that's someone at the pinnacle of a very steep hierarchy who has a tremendous amount of power and influence. The Christian response to that was, never confuse the specific sovereign with the principle of sovereignty itself. It's brilliant. You can see how difficult it is to come up with an idea like that, so that even the person who has the power is actually subordinate to a divine principle, for lack of a better word. Even the king himself is subordinate to the principle. We still believe that because we believe our Prime Minister is subordinate to the damn law.

Whatever the body of law, there's a principle inside that even the leader is subordinate to. Without that, you could argue you can't even have a civilized society, because your leader immediately turns into something that's transcendent and all-powerful. That's certainly what happened in the Soviet Union, and what happened in Maoist China, and what happened in Nazi Germany. There was nothing for the powerful to subordinate themselves to. You're supposed to be subordinate to God. What does that mean? We're going to tear that idea apart, but partly what that means is that you're subordinate—even if you're sovereign—to the principles of sovereignty itself. And then the question is, what the hell is the principles of sovereignty? I would say we have been working that out for a very long period of time. That's one of the things

that we'll talk about.

The ancient Mesopotamians and the ancient Egyptians had some very interesting, dramatic ideas about that. For example, very briefly, there was a deity known as [Marduk](#). Marduk was a Mesopotamian deity, and imagine this is sort of what happened. As an empire grew out of the post-ice age—15,000 years ago, 10,000 years ago—all these tribes came together. These tribes each had their own deity; their own image of the ideal, but then they started to occupy the same territory. One tribe had God A, and one tribe had God B, and one could wipe the other one out, and then it would just be God A who wins. That's not so good because maybe you want to trade with those people, or maybe you don't want to lose half your population in a war, something like that. So then you have to have an argument about whose God is going to take priority, which ideal is going to take priority.

What seems to happen is represented in mythology as a battle of the Gods in celestial space. From a practical perspective, it's more like an ongoing dialog. You believe this; I believe this. You believe that; I believe this. How are we going to meld that together? You take God A, and you take God B, and maybe what you do is extract God C from them, and you say, God C now has the attributes of A and B. And then some other tribes come in, and C takes them over too. Take Marduk, for example. He has 50 different names, at least in part, of the subordinate Gods that represented the tribes that came together to make the civilization. That's part of the process by which that abstracted ideal is abstracted. You think this is important, and it works because your tribe is alive, and so we'll take the best of both, if we can manage it, and extract out something that's even more abstract that covers both of us.

I'll give you a couple of Marduk's interesting features. He has eyes all the way around his head. He's elected by all the other Gods to be king God. That's the first thing. That's quite cool. They elect him because they're facing a terrible threat, sort of like a flood and a monster combined, something like that. Marduk basically says that, if they elect him top God, he'll go out and stop the flood monster, and they won't all get wiped out. It's a serious threat. It's chaos itself making its comeback. All the Gods agree, and Marduk is the new manifestation. He's got eyes all the way around his head, and he speaks magic words. When he fights, he fights this deity called [Tiamat](#). We need to know that, because the word Tiamat is associated with the word [tehom](#). Tehom is the chaos that God makes order out of at the beginning of time in Genesis, so it's linked very tightly

to this story. Marduk with his eyes and his capacity to speak magic words goes out and confronts Tiamat, who's like this watery sea dragon, something like that. It's a classic [Saint George](#) story: go out and wreak havoc on the dragon. He cuts her into pieces, and he makes the world out of her pieces, and that's the world that human beings live in.

The Mesopotamian emperor acted out Marduk. He was allowed to be emperor insofar as he was a good Marduk. That meant that he had eyes all the way around his head, and he could speak magic; he could speak properly. We are starting to understand, at that point, the essence of leadership. Because what's leadership? It's the capacity to see what the hell's in front of your face, and maybe in every direction, and maybe the capacity to use your language properly to transform chaos into order. God only knows how long it took the Mesopotamians to figure that out. The best they could do was dramatize it, but it's staggeringly brilliant. It's by no means obvious, and this chaos is a very strange thing. This is a chaos that God wrestled with at the beginning of time.

Chaos is half psychological and half real. There's no other way to really describe it. Chaos is what you encounter when you're blown into pieces and thrown into deep confusion, when your world falls apart, when your dreams die, when you're betrayed. It's the chaos that emerges, and the chaos is everything it wants, and it's too much for you, and that's for sure. It pulls you down into the underworld, and that's where the dragons are. All you've got at that point is your capacity to bloody well keep your eyes open and to speak as carefully and as clearly as you can, and maybe, if you're lucky, you'll get through it that way and come out the other side. It's taken people a very long time to figure that out, and it looks to me that the idea is erected on the platform of our ancient ancestors, maybe tens of millions of years ago, because we seem to represent that which disturbs us deeply using the same system that we used to represent serpentine, or other, carnivorous predators.

We're biological creatures. When we formulated our capacity to abstract, our strange capacity to abstract and use language, we still had all those underlying systems that were there when we were only animals. We have to use those systems that are there. Part of the emotional and motivational architecture of our thinking, part of the reason why we can demonize our enemies who upset our axioms, is because we perceive them as if they're carnivorous predators. We do it with the same system. That's chaos itself, the thing that always threatens us—the snakes that came to the trees when we lived in them like 60 million years ago. It's the same damned system.

ago. It's the same damned systems.

The Marduk story is partly the story of using attention and language to confront those things that most threaten us. Some of those things are real world threats, but some of them are psychological threats, which are just as profound but far more abstract. But we use the same system to represent them. That's why you freeze if you're frightened. You're a prey animal. You're like a rabbit, and you've seen something that's going to eat you. You freeze, and you're paralyzed. You're turned to stone, which is what you do when you see a Medusa with a head full of snakes. You turn to stone. You're paralyzed, and the reason you do that is because you're using the predator detector system to protect yourself. Your heart rate goes way up, and you get ready to move. Things that upset us rely on that system. The Marduk story, for example, is the idea that if there are things that upset you—chaotic, terrible, serpentine, monstrous, underworld things that threaten you—the best thing to do is open your eyes, keep your speech organized, and go out, confront the thing, and make the world out of it. It's staggering. When I read that story and started to understand it, it just blew me away. It's such a profound idea, and we know it's true, too, because we know in psychotherapy that you're much better off to confront your fears head-on than you are to wait and let them find you.

Partly what you do, if you're a psychotherapist, is you help people break their fears into little pieces—the things that upset them—and then to encounter them one by one and master them. You're teaching this process of internal mastery over the strange and chaotic world. All of that makes up some of the background. We haven't even gotten to the first sentence of the Biblical stories yet, but all of that makes up the background. We extracted this story, this strange collection of stories, with all its errors and its repetitions and its peculiarities, out of the entire history that we've been able to collect ideas, and it's the best we've been able to do. I know there are other religious traditions. I'm not concerned about that at the moment because we can use this as an example. What I'm hoping is that we can return to the stories with an open mind and see if there is something there that we actually need. I hope that will be the case. As I've said, I'll approach it as rationally as I possibly can.

This is the idea to begin with. We have the unknown as such, and then we act in it like animals act. They act first; they don't think. They don't imagine; they act, and that's where we started. We started by acting, and then we started to be able to represent how we acted, and then we started to talk about how we represented how we acted. That enabled us to tell stories, because that is what a story is: it's

to tell about how you represent how you act. You know that, because if you read a book, what happens? You read the book and images come to mind of the people in the book behaving. It's one step from acting it out. You don't act it out because you can abstract. You can represent action without having to act it out. It's an amazing thing, and that's part of the development of the [prefrontal cortex](#). It's part of the capacity for human abstract thought. You can pull the representation of the behaviour away from the behaviour and manipulate the representation before you enact it. That's why you think, so that you can generate a pattern of action and test it out in a fictional world before you embody it and die because you're foolish. You let the representation die, not you. That's why you think, and that's partly what we're trying to do with these stories.

What do I hope to accomplish? I hope to end this 12-lecture series knowing more than I did when I started. That's my goal, because I've said that I'm not telling you what I know; I'm trying to figure things out. This is part of the process by which I'm doing that, and so I'm doing my best to think on my feet. I come prepared, but I'm trying to stay on the edge of my capacity to generate knowledge, to make this continually clear, and to get to the bottom things. That's what I hope to accomplish. It seems like people are interested in that, so we're going to try to accomplish that together. That's the plan.

The idea is to see if there's something at the bottom of this amazing civilization that we've managed to structure, that I think is in peril, for a variety of reasons. Maybe if we understand it a little bit better we won't be so prone just to throw the damned thing away, which I think would be a big mistake. And to throw it away because of resentment, hatred, bitterness, historical ignorance, jealousy, the desire for destruction, and all of that...I don't want to go there. It's a bad idea to go there. We need to be grounded better.

All right, so how do I approach this? Well, first of all, I think in evolutionary terms. As far as I'm concerned, the cosmos is 15 billion years old; the world is 4.5 billion years old; there's been life for 3.5 billion years, and there are creatures that had pretty developed nervous systems 300 to 600 million years ago. We were living in trees as small mammals 60 million years ago, and we were down on the plains between 60 million and seven million years ago, and that's about when we split from chimpanzees. Modern human beings seemed to emerge about 150,000 years ago and civilization pretty much after the ice age, something after 15,000 years ago, not very long ago at all. That's the span across which I want to understand.



I want to understand why we are the way we are, looking at life in its continual complexity right from the beginning of life itself. There's some real utility in that because we share attributes with other animals, even animals as simple as crustaceans, for example. Crustaceans have nervous system properties that are very much like ours, and it's very much worth knowing that. I think in an evolutionary way. I think it's a grand and remarkable way to think because it has this incredible time span. It's this amazing—I mean, people at the end of the 19th century, middle of the 19th century, really thought the world was about 6,000 years old. 15 billion years old is a lot more. It's a lot grander and bigger, but it's also a lot more frightening and alienating, in some sense, because the cosmos has become so vast. It's easy for human beings to think of themselves as trivial specs on a trivial spec out some misbegotten hellhole-end-of-the-galaxy among hundreds of millions of galaxies.

It's very easy to see yourself as nothing in that span of time. That's a real challenge for people. I think it's a mistake to think that way because I think consciousness is far more than we think it is. It's still something that we have to grapple with. I'm a psychoanalytic thinker. What that means is that I believe that people are collections of subpersonalities, and that those subpersonalities are alive, not machines. They have their viewpoint; they have their wants; they have their perceptions; they have their arguments; they have their emotions. They're like low resolution representations of you. When you get angry, it's like a very low resolution representation of you. It only wants rage, or it only wants something to eat, or it only wants water; it only wants sex. It's you, but shrunk and focused in a specific direction. All those motivational systems are very, very ancient, very archaic and very, very powerful. They play a determining role in the manner in which we manifest ourselves. As Freud pointed out with the [id](#), we have to figure out how we take all those underlying animalistic motivations and emotions and civilize them in some way so that we can all live in the same general territory without tearing each other to shreds, which is maybe the default position of both chimpanzee and humanity. So I take seriously the idea that we're a loose collection of spirits.

It says in the Old Testament, somewhere, that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. I think this is akin to that. If you know that you're not in control of yourself thoroughly and that there are other factors behind the scenes—like the ancient Greeks, who thought that human beings were the playthings of the Gods; that's the way they conceptualized the world. They sort of meant the same thing. They meant there are these great forces that move us that we don't create, that

we're subordinate to, in some sense. Not entirely, but you can be subordinate to them, and they move our destinies. That was the Greek view.

Understanding that teaches you humility, and that there's a hell of a lot more going on behind the scenes. You're the driver of a very complex vehicle, but you don't understand the vehicle very well, and it's got its own motivations and methods. Sometimes you think it's doing something, and it's doing something completely different. You see that in psychotherapy all the time, because you help someone unwind a pattern of behaviour that they've manifested forever. First of all, they describe it and they become aware of it, then maybe they start to see what the cause is. They have no idea why they were acting like that. They have to have the memory that produced the behavioural pattern to bring with. It has to be brought back to mind, then it has to be analyzed and assessed, and then they have to think of a different way of acting. It's extraordinarily complex.

Literary... Well, there's this postmodern idea about literature—and about the world, for that matter—that, if you take a complex piece of literature like a Shakespeare play, there's no end to the number of interpretations that you can make of it. You can interpret each word, each phrase, each sentence, each paragraph. You can interpret the entire play. The way you interpret it depends on how many other books you've read, and it depends on your orientation in the world. It depends on a very, very large number of things. How cultured you are, or how much culture you lack. All of those things. It opens up a huge vista for potential interpretation. The postmodernists sort of stubbed their toe on that and thought, well, if there's this vast number of interpretations of any particular literary work, how can you be sure that any interpretation is any more valid than any other interpretation? And if you can't be sure, then how do you even know those are great works? How do you know they're not just works that people in power have used to facilitate their continual accession of power? Which is really a postmodern idea and a very, very cynical one. It has its point, but the thing is grounded in something real. Yes, you can interpret things forever. I want to show you something here, briefly. We'll get back to it later. Look at this. This is one of the coolest things that I've ever seen. At the bottom here, every single one of those lines is a Biblical verse. The length of the line is proportional to how many times that verse is referred to in some way by some other verse. So this is the first hyperlinked book. I'm dead serious about that. You can't click and get the hyperlinks, obviously, but it's a thoroughly hyperlinked book. It's because the people who worked on these stories that are hypothetically at the end—which is the end, the end can't affect the beginning. That's the rule of time: what happens now can't affect what happened to you 10 years ago...even though it

...actually can, but whatever...you reinterpret things, then they're not the same. But whatever, we won't get into that. Technically speaking, the present cannot effect the past. But that's not right if you're looking at a piece of literature, because when you write the end you know what was at the beginning, and when you write the beginning—or edit it—you know what's at the end, and so you can weave the whole thing together. There's 65,000 cross-references, and that's what this map shows. That's a great visual representation of the book. Why is it deep? Why is the book deep? Well, just imagine how many pathways you could take through that. You'd just journey through that forever. You'd never, ever get to the end of it. There's permutations and combinations, and every phrase is dependent on every other phrase, and every verse is dependent on every other verse...well, not entirely, but 65,000 is not a bad start.

That's another issue that seems to make the postmodernist critique even more correct: how in the world are you going to extract out a canonical interpretation of something like that? It's like, it's not possible. But here is the issue, as far as I can tell: the postmodernists extended that critique to the world. They said look, text is complicated enough; you can't extract out a canonical interpretation. What about the world? The world's way more complicated than a text, and there's an infinite number of ways that you can look at the world. How do we know that any one way is better than any other way? That's a good question. The postmodern answer was, we can't. That's not a good answer, because you drown in chaos under those circumstances. You can't make sense of anything, and that's not good because it's not neutral to not make sense of things. It's very anxiety-provoking and depressing. If things are so chaotic that you can't get a handle on them, your body defaults into emergency preparation mode. Your heart rate goes up, and your immune system stops working. You burn yourself out; you age rapidly because you're surrounded by nothing you can control. That's an existential crisis. It's anxiety-provoking and depressing, very hard on people. Even more than that, it turns out that the way we're constructed neurophysiologically is that we don't experience any positive emotion unless we have an aim and we can see ourselves progressing towards that aim.

It isn't precisely attaining the aim that makes us happy—as you all know if you've ever attained anything. As soon as you attain it, the whole little game ends and you have to come up with another game. So it's [Sisyphus](#), and that's ok. But it does show that the attainment can't be the thing that drives you, because it collapses the game. That's what happens when you graduate from university. It's like, you're king of the mountain for one day, then you're like

serf at Starbucks for the next five years. Human beings are weird creatures: we're much more activated by having an aim and moving towards it than we are by attaining it. What that means is that you have to have an aim, and that means you have to have an interpretation. It also means that the nobler the aim, the better your life. That's a really interesting thing to know because you've heard, ever since you were tiny, that you should act like a good person—you shouldn't lie, for example—and you might think, well, why should I act like a good person? Why not lie? Even a three-year-old can ask that question—because smart kids learn to lie earlier, by the way—and they think, why not twist the fabric of reality so that it serves my specific, short-term needs? That's a great question. Why not do that? Why act morally if you can get away with something and it brings you closer to something you want? Well, why not do it? These are good questions. It's not self-evident.

It seems to me tied into what I just mentioned. You destabilize yourself and things become chaotic, and that's not good. If you do not have a noble aim, you have nothing but shallow trivial pleasures, and they don't sustain you. That's not good, because life is difficult. There's so much suffering and complexity. It ends, everyone dies, and it's painful. Without a noble aim, how can you withstand any of that? You can't; you become desperate. Things go from bad to worse very rapidly when you become desperate. And so there's the idea of the noble aim, and it's something that's necessary. It's the bread that people cannot live without. It's not mystical bread: it's the noble aim. And what is that? It was encapsulated, in part, in the story of Marduk: it's to pay attention, speak properly, confront chaos, and make a better world. It's something like that. That's enough of a noble aim so that you can stand up without cringing at the very thought of your own existence, so that you can do something that's worthwhile to justify your wretched position on the planet.

The literary issue is that you can interpret a text in a variety of ways, but that's not right. This is where the postmodernists went wrong. What you're looking for in a text—and in the world, for that matter—is sufficient order and direction. We have to think, what does sufficient order and direction mean? You don't want to suffer so much that your life is unbearable. That just seems self-evident. Pain argues for itself. I think of pain as the fundamental reality because no one disputes it. Even if you say that you don't believe in pain, it doesn't help when you're in pain. You still believe in it. You can't pry it up with logic and rationality. It just stands forth as the fundament of existence, and that's actually quite useful to know, to say you don't want any more of that than is absolutely

necessary. I think that's self-evident.

But then you say, wait a minute; it's more complicated than that. You don't want anymore than that that's necessary today, but also not tomorrow, and not next week, and not next month, and not next year. So however you act now better not compromise how you're going to be in a year, because that'd just be counterproductive. That's part of the problem with short-term pleasures. Act in haste, repent at leisure. Everyone knows exactly what that means. You have to act in a way that works now, and tomorrow, and next week, and next month, and so forth. So you have to take your future self into account. Human beings can do that. Taking your future self into account isn't much different than taking other people into account.

There's this Simpsons episode, and Homer downs a quart of mayonnaise and vodka. Marge says, you know, you shouldn't really do that. And Homer says, that's a problem for future-Homer. I'm sure glad I'm not that guy. It's so ridiculous and comical. But, ok, you see we have to grapple with that. The you that's out there in the future is sort of like another person, and so figuring out how to conduct yourself properly in relationship to your future self isn't much different than figuring out how to conduct yourself in relationship to other people. Then we can expand the constraints. Not only does the interpretation that you extract have to protect you from suffering and give you an aim, but it has to do it in a way that's iterable, so it works across time, and then it has to work in the presence of other people so that you can cooperate with them and compete with them in a way that doesn't make you suffer more.

People are not that tolerant. They have choices. They don't have to hang around with you; they can hang around with any one of these other primates, so if you don't act properly, at least within certain boundaries, you're just cast aside. People are broadcasting information at you all the time about how you need to interpret the world so they can tolerate being around you. And you need that because, socially isolated, you're insane, and then you're dead. No one can tolerate being alone for any length of time. We can't retain our own sanity without continual feedback from other people. It's too damned complicated. You're constrained by your own existence, and then you're constrained by the existence of other people, and then you're also constrained by the world. If I read Hamlet and what I extracted out of that is the idea that I should jump off a bridge, it puts my interpretation to an end rather quickly. It doesn't seem to be optimally functional.

An interpretation is constrained by the reality of the world. It's constrained by the reality of other people, and it's constrained by your reality across time. There's only a small number of interpretations that are going to work in that tightly defined space. That's part of the reason that postmodernists are wrong. It's also part of the reason, by the way, that AI people who are trying to make intelligent machines have had to put them in a body. It turns out that you just can't make something intelligent without it being embodied, and it's partly for the reasons that I've just described. You need constraints on the system so that the system doesn't drown in an infinite sea of interpretation. It's something like that. So that's the literary end of it.

Moral. Morality for me is about action. I'm an existentialist, in some sense, and what that means is that I believe that what people believe to be true is what they act out, not what they say. There's lots of definitions of truth. Truth is a very expansive word. You can think of objective truth, but behavioural truth is the same as objective truth. What you should do isn't the same as what is, as far as I can tell. People debate that, but I think the reason that has to be the case is because—think about it this way: You're standing in front of a field. You can see the field, but the field doesn't tell you how to walk through. There's an infinite number of ways you could walk through, and so you can't extract out an inviolable guide to how you should act from the array of facts that are in front of you. There's just too many facts, and you don't have directionality. But you need to know how not to suffer, and you need to know what your aim is, and so you need to overlay that objective reality with some interpretative structure. It's the nature of that interpretive structure that we're going to be aiming at hard.

I've given you some hints about it already. We've extracted it in part from observations of our own behaviour and other people's behaviour, and we've extracted it in part by the nature of our embodiment that's been shaped over hundreds of millions of years. We see the infinite plane of facts and we impose a moral interpretation on it. The moral interpretation is what to do about what is. That's associated both with security—because you just don't need too much complexity—and also with aim. We're mobile creatures, and we need to know where we're going. All we're ever concerned about, roughly speaking, is where we're going. That's what we need to know: where we are we going, what we are doing, and why. That's not the same question as, what is the world made of objectively? It's a different question. It requires different answers. That's the domain of the moral, as far as I'm concerned, which is, what are you aiming at? That's the question of the ultimate ideal, in some sense. Even if you have trivial

little fragmentary ideals, there's something trying to emerge out of that that's more coherent and more integrated and more applicable and more practical. And that's the other thing: you think about literature, and you think about art, and you think those aren't very tightly tied to the earth. They're [empyrean](#), airy, spiritual, and they don't seem practical. But I'm a practical person.

Part of the reason that I want to assess these books from a literary, aesthetic, and evolutionary perspective is to extract out something of value that's practical. One of the rules that I have, when I'm lecturing, is that I don't want to tell anybody anything that they can't use. I think of knowledge as a tool. It's something to implement in the world. We're tool-using creatures, and our knowledge is tools. We need tools to work in the world. We need tools to regulate our emotions, to make things better, to put an end to suffering to the degree that we can, to live with ourselves properly, and to stand up properly. You need the tools to do that. So I don't want to do anything in this lecture series that isn't practical. I want you to come away having things put together in a way that you can immediately apply. I'm not interested in abstraction for the sake of abstraction. It's gotta make sense, because the more restrictions on your theory, the better. I want it all laid out causally so that B follows A and B precedes C. That way it's understandable and doesn't require any unnecessary leap of faith.

Another thing that I think interferes with our relationship with a collection of books like the Bible is that you're called upon to believe things that no one can believe. That's no good, because that's a form of lie, as far as I can tell. Then you have to scrap the whole thing because, in principle, the whole thing is about truth. If you have to start your pursuit of truth by swallowing a bunch of lies, how in the world are you going to get anywhere with that? I don't want any uncertainty at the bottom of this, or I don't want any more than I have to leave in it because I can't get any farther than that. It's going to make sense rationally. Even though science is in flux, I don't want it to be pushing up against what we know to be scientifically untrue. That's something of a dangerous parameter. If it isn't working with evolutionary theory, for example, then I think that it's not a good enough solution.

And then, finally, it's [phenomenological](#). Modern people think of reality as objective, and that's very powerful, but that isn't how we experience reality. We have our domain of experience, and this is a hard thing to get a grip on, even though it should be the most obvious thing. For the phenomenologists, everything that you experience is real. They're interested in the structure of your

subjective experience. You have subjective experience, and you have subjective experience, and so do you, and there's commonalities across all of those. For example, you're likely to experience the same set of emotions. We've been able to identify canonical emotions, and without canonical motivations we couldn't even communicate, because you wouldn't know what the other person was like; you'd have to explain infinitely. There's nothing you could take for granted, but you can.

Phenomenology is the fact that at the centre of my vision my hands are clear and out in the periphery they disappear. Phenomenology is the way things smell and the way things taste, and the fact that they matter, and so you could say, in some sense, that phenomenology is the study of what matters, rather than matter. It's a given from the phenomenological perspective that things have meaning. Even if you're a rationalist, a cynic, and a nihilist, and say nothing has any meaning, you still run into the problem of pain. Pain undercuts your arguments and has a meaning. There's no escaping from the meaning. You can pretty much demolish all the positive parts of it, but trying to think your way out of the negative parts...Good luck with that, because that just doesn't work. The Bible stories—and I think this is true of fiction in general—is phenomenological. It concentrates on trying to elucidate the nature of human experience. That is not the same as the objective world. It's also a form of truth, because it is true that you have a field of experience and that it has qualities. The question is, what are the qualities?

Ancient representations of reality were sort of a weird meld of observable phenomena—things we would consider objective facts—and the projection of subjective truth. I'll show you how the Mesopotamians viewed the world. They had a model of the world as a disc. If you go out in a field at night, what does the world look like? Well, it's a disc. It's got a dome on top of it. That was basically the Mesopotamian view of the world, and the view of the world of people who wrote the first stories in the Bible. There was water on top of the dome. Well, obviously. It rains, right? Where does the water come from? There's water around the dome. The disc is made of land, and then underneath that there's water. How do you know that? Well, drill. You'll hit water; it's under the earth. Otherwise how would you hit the water? And then what's under that? Fresh water. And then what's under that? If you go to the edge of the disc, you hit the ocean. It's salt water. So it's a dome with water outside of it, and then it's a disc that the dome sits on, and then underneath that there's fresh water, and then underneath that there's salt water. That was roughly the Mesopotamian world.



That's a mix of observation and imagination, because that isn't the world, but it is the way the world appears. It's a perfectly believable cosmology. The sun rises and the sun sets on that dome. It's not like the thing is bloody well spinning. Who would ever think that up? It's obvious that the sun comes up and goes down and then travels underneath the world and comes back up again. There's nothing more self-evident than that. That's that strange intermingling of subjectively fantasy, right at the level of perception, and actually observable phenomena. All of the cosmology that's associated with the Biblical stories is exactly like that: it's half psychology and half reality, although the psychological is real as well.

To know that the Biblical stories have a phenomenological truth is really worth knowing. The poor fundamentalists are trying to cling to their moral structure. I understand why, because it does organize their societies and their psyche. So they've got something to cling to, but they don't have a very sophisticated idea of the complexity of what constitutes truth. They try to gerrymander the Biblical stories into the domain of scientific theory—promoting creationism, for example, as an alternative scientific theory. It's like, that just isn't going to go anywhere. The people who wrote these damned stories weren't scientists to begin with. There weren't any scientists back then—there's hardly any scientists now.

Really, it's hard to think scientifically. Man, it takes a lot of training, and even scientists don't think scientifically once you get them out of the lab, and hardly even when they're in the lab. You have to get peer-reviewed and criticized. It's hard to think scientifically. However, the people who wrote these stories thought more like how dramatists think, more like how Shakespeare thought, but that doesn't mean there isn't truth in it. It just means you have to be a little bit more sophisticated about your ideas of truth, and that's ok. There are truths to live by. Ok, fine. We want to figure out what those are, because we need to live and maybe not to suffer so much. And so if you know that what the Bible stories, and stories in general, are trying to represent is the structure of the lived experience of conscious individuals, you open up the possibility of a whole different realm of understanding. It eliminates the contradiction that's been painful for people, between the objective world and the claims of religious stories.

Let's take a look at the structure of the book itself. The first thing about the Bible is that it's a comedy, and a comedy has a happy ending. That's a strange thing because the Greek God stories were almost always tragic. The Bible is a comedy. It has a happy ending. Everyone lives, and there's a heaven. What you

think about that is a completely different issue. I'm just telling you the structure of the story. It's something like, there was paradise at the beginning of time and then some cataclysms occurred and people fell into history. History is limitation, mortality, suffering, and self-consciousness. But there's a mode of being—or potentially the establishment of a state—that will transcend that, and that's what time is aiming at. That's the idea of the story.

It's a funny thing that the Bible has a story, because it wasn't written as a book: it was assembled from a whole bunch of different books. The fact that it got assembled into something resembling a story is quite remarkable. The question is, what is that story about? And how did it come up as a story? Is there anything to it? It constituted a dramatic record of self-realization or abstraction. I already mentioned that. The idea of the formulation of the image of God is an abstraction. That's how we're going to handle it, to begin with. I want to say—because I said I wasn't going to be any more reductionist than necessary—that I know the evidence for genuine religious experience is incontrovertible, but it's not explicable, and so I don't want to explain it away. I want to just leave it as a fact, and then I want to pull back from that and say, ok, we'll leave that as a fact and the mystery, and, well, we're going to look at this from a rational perspective and say that the initial formulation of the idea of God was an attempt to abstract out an ideal and to consider it as an abstraction outside of its instantiation. That's good enough. That's an amazing thing, if it's true. But I don't want to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

It's a collection of books with multiple redactors and editors. What does that mean? Many people wrote it, there's many different books, and they're interwoven together—especially in the first five books by people who, I suspect, took the traditions of tribes that had been brought together under a single political organization and tried to make their accounts coherent. They took a little of this, and they took a little of that, and they took a little of this, and they tried not to lose anything because it seemed valuable. It certainly seemed valuable to the people who collected the stories, because they weren't gonna tolerate too much editing. But they also wanted it to make sense, to some degree, so it wasn't completely logically contradictory and completely absurd. Many people wrote it, and many people edited it, and many people assembled it over a vast stretch of time. We have very few documents like that, and so just because we have a document like that is sufficient reason to look at it as a remarkable phenomena and to try to understand what it is that it's trying to communicate. I said it's also the world's first hyperlinked text, which is very much worth

thinking about for quite a long time. There's four sources in the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Bible. Four stories that we know came together. The first one was called the [Priestly](#). It used the name [Elohim](#), or [El Shaddai](#), for God. I believe [el](#) is the root for allah as well. This is usually translated as God, or the Gods, because Elohim is utilized as plural in the beginning books of the Bible. It's newer than the [Jahwist](#) version. The reason I'm telling you that is because Genesis 1, which is the first story, isn't as old as Genesis 2. Genesis 2 contains the Jahwist version. It contains the story of Adam and Eve. That's older than the very first book in the Bible, but they decided to put the newer version first. I think it's because it deals with more fundamental abstractions, it's something like that. It deals with the most basic of abstractions, how the universe was created, and then segues into what the human environment is like. That seems to be the logic behind it. The Jahwist version uses the name [YHWH](#), which, apparently, people didn't say but we believe was pronounced something like Yahwa. It has a strongly anthropomorphic God that takes human form. It begins with Genesis 2:4. This is the account of the heavens and the earth, and it contains the story of Adam and Eve, and Cain and Abel, and Noah, and the Tower of Babel, and Exodus, and Numbers, along with the Priestly version. It also contains the law in the form—just the form—of the Ten Commandments, which is like a truncated form of the law.

There's the Elohist source. It contains the stories of Abraham and Isaac. It's concerned with a heavenly hierarchy that includes angels. It talks about the departure from Egypt and it presents the covenant code, which is this idea that society is predicated—this was Israeli society—on a covenant with God that's laid out in a sequence of rules, some of which are the Ten Commandment but many of which are much more extensive than that.

The final one is the Deuteronomist Code. It contains the bulk of the law and what's called the Deuteronomic History. It's independent of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. And so we know that, at least.

Now, there's debate about this like there is about everything. I'm brushing over a large area of scholarship, but people generally assume that there were multiple authors over multiple periods of time. The way they've concluded that is by looking at textual analysis, trying to see where there are chunks of the stories that have the same kind of style or the same references. People argue about that because, you know, obviously it's difficult to recreate something ancient. But that's the basic idea. It is an amalgam of viewpoints about these initial issues, and that's important to know. It's like a collective story.

and that's important to know. It's like a collective story.

Ok, to understand the first part of Genesis I'm going to turn, strangely enough, to something that's actually part of the New Testament. This is a central element of Christianity. It's a very strange idea that's gonna take a very long time to unpack. This is what John said about Christ. He said, "in the beginning was the word." That relates back to Genesis 1. "In the beginning was the word, and word was with God, and the word was God." Three sentences like that take a lot of unpacking because, well, none of that seems to make any sense whatsoever. "In the beginning was the word, and the word was both with God and the word was God." So the first question might be, what in the world does that mean? "In the beginning was the word." That's the [logos](#), and the logos is embodied in the figure of Christ. There's this idea in John that whatever Christ is—a son of God—is not only instantiated—a particular time and place as a carpenter in some backwoods part of the world—but is also something eternal that exists up outside of time and space, that was there right at the beginning.

As far as I can tell, what that logos represents is something like what modern people refer to when they talk about consciousness. It's something like that—it's more than that. It's like consciousness and its capacity to be aware and to communicate. There's an idea underneath that which is that being—especially from a phenomenological perspective, so the being that is experience—cannot exist without consciousness. It's like consciousness shines a light on things to bring it into being. Without consciousness, what is there? No one experiences anything. Is there anything when no one experiences anything? That's the question, and the answer this book is presenting is that no, you have to think about consciousness as a constituent element of reality. It's something that's necessary for reality itself to exist. Of course, it opens up what you mean by "reality," but the reality that's being referred to here—I've told you already—is this strange amalgam of the subjective experience and the world. But the question is deeper than that, too, because it is by no means obvious what there is if there's no one to experience it. The whole notion of time itself seems to collapse, at least in terms of something like felt duration. The notion of size disappears; there's nothing to scale it. Causality seems to vanish. We don't understand consciousness, not in the least. We don't understand what it is that is in us that gives illumination to being.

What happens in the Old Testament, at least in part, is that consciousness is associated with the divine. Now you think, well, is that a reasonable proposition? That's a very complicated question, but at least we might note that there's

something to the claim, because there is a miracle of experience and existence that's dependent on consciousness. People try to explain it away constantly, but it doesn't seem to work very well. And here's something else to think about—I think it's really worth thinking about. People do not like it when you treat them like they're not conscious. They react very badly to that. You don't like it if someone assumes that you're not conscious, and you don't like it if someone assumes you don't have free will, that you're just absolutely determined in your actions and there's nothing that's going to repair you, and that you don't need to have any responsibility for your actions.

Our culture, the laws of our culture, are predicated on the idea that people are conscious. People have experience; people make decisions and can be held responsible for them. There's a free will element to it. You can debate all that philosophically, and fine, but the point is that that is how we act and that is the idea that our legal system is predicated on. There's something deep about it because you're subject to the law, but the law is also limited by you, which is to say that in a well-functioning, properly-grounded democratic system you have intrinsic value. That's the source of your rights. Even if you're a murderer, we have to say the law can only go so far because there's something about you that's divine. Well, what does that mean? Partly it means that there's something about you that's conscious and capable of communicating, like you're a whole world unto yourself. You have that to contribute to everyone else, and that's valuable. You can learn new things, transform the structure of society, and invent a new way of dealing with the world. You're capable of all that. It's an intrinsic part of you, and that's associated with the idea that there's something about the logos that is necessary for the absolute chaos of the reality beyond experience to manifest itself as reality. That's an amazing idea because it gives consciousness a constitutive role in the cosmos. You can debate that but you can't just bloody well brush it off because, first of all, we are the most complicated things there are, that we know of, by a massive amount. We're so complicated that it's unbelievable. So there's a lot of cosmos out there, but there's a lot of cosmos in here, too, and which one is greater is by no means obvious unless you use something trivial, like relative size, which really isn't a very sophisticated approach.

Whatever it is that is you has this capacity to experience reality and to transform it, which is a very strange thing. You can conceptualize the future in your imagination, and then you can work and make that manifest—participate in the process of creation, that's one way of thinking about it. That's why I think

Genesis 1 relates the idea that human beings are made in the image of the divine—men and women, which is interesting because feminists are always criticizing Christianity as being inexorably patriarchal. Of course, they criticize everything like that, so it's hardly a stroke of bloody brilliance. But I think it's an absolute miracle that right at the beginning of the document it says straightforwardly, with no hesitation whatsoever, that the divine spark which we're associating with the word, that brings forth being, is manifest in men and women equally. That's a very cool thing. You got to think, like I said, do you actually take that seriously? Well, what you got to ask is what happens if you don't take it seriously, right? Read Dostoevsky's [Crime and Punishment](#). That's the best investigation into that tactic that's ever been produced.

What happens in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* is that the main character, whose name is Raskolnikov, decides that there's no intrinsic value to other people and that, as a consequence, he can do whatever he wants. It's only cowardice that stops him from acting. Why would it be anything else if value of other people is just an arbitrary superstition? Well, then why can't I do exactly what I want, when I want? Which is the psychopath's viewpoint. Well, so Raskolnikov does: he kills someone who's a very horrible person, and he has very good reasons for killing her. He's half-starved, and a little bit insane, and possessed by this ideology—it's a brilliant, brilliant layout—and he finds out something after he kills her, which is that the post-killing Raskolnikov and the pre-killing Raskolnikov are not the same person, even a little bit, because he's broken a rule. He's broken a serious rule and there's no going back.

*Crime and Punishment* is the best investigation, I know, of what happens if you take the notion that there's nothing divine about the individual seriously. Most of the people I know who are deeply atheistic—and I understand why they're deeply atheistic—haven't contended with people like Dostoevsky. Not as far as I can tell, because I don't see logical flaws in *Crime and Punishment*. I think he got the psychology exactly right. Dostoevsky's amazing for this. In one of his books, [The Devils](#), he describes a political scenario that's not much different than the one we find ourselves in now. There's these people who are possessed by rationalistic, utopian, atheistic ideas and they're very powerful. They give rise to the communist revolution. They're powerful ideas.

His character, Stavrogin, also acts out the presupposition that human beings have no intrinsic nature and no intrinsic value. It's another brilliant investigation. Dostoevsky prophesized what will happen to a society if it goes down that road, and he was dead-on, exactly accurate. It's uncanny to read Dostoevsky's *The*

and he was dead, exactly accurate. It's uncanny to read Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*—or *The Devils*, depending on the translation—and to read Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. One is fiction and prophecy and the second is, hey, look, it turned out exactly the way Dostoevsky said it would for exactly the same reasons. It's quite remarkable. So the question is, do you contend seriously with the idea that, A, there's something cosmically constitutive about consciousness, and B, that that might well be considered divine, and C, that that is instantiated in every person? And then ask yourself—if you're not a criminal—if you don't act it out? And then ask yourself what that means. Is that reflective of a reality? Is it a metaphor? Maybe it's a complex metaphor that we have to use to organize our societies. It could well be. But even as a metaphor, it's true enough so that we mess with it at our peril. It also took people a very long time to figure out.

This is Genesis 1, and I'm probably going to stop there because I believe it's 9:30. We didn't even get to the first line. I want to read you a couple of things that we'll use as a [prodromos](#) for the next lecture. I'll just bounce through a collection of ideas that's associated with the notion of divinity. We'll turn back to the first lines when we start the next lecture. I have no idea how far I'm going to get through the Biblical stories, by the way, because I'm trying to figure this out as I go along. There's an idea in Christianity of the image of God as a Trinity. There's the element of the Father, there's the element of the Son, and there's the element of the Holy Spirit. It's something like the spirit of tradition, human being as the living incarnation of that tradition, and the spirit in people that makes relationship with the spirit and individuals possible. I'm going to bounce my way quickly through some of the classical, metaphorical attributes of God so that we kind of have a cloud of notions about what we're talking about when we return to Genesis 1 and talk about the God who spoke chaos into being. There's a fatherly aspect, so here's what God as a father is like. You can enter into a covenant with it, so you can make a bargain with it. Now, you think about that. Money is like that, because money is a bargain you make with the future. We structured our world so that you can negotiate with the future. I don't think that we would have got to the point where we could do that without having this idea to begin with. You can act as if the future's a reality; there's a spirit of tradition that enables you to act as if the future is something that can be bargained with. That's why you make sacrifices. The sacrifices were acted out for a very long period of time, and now they're psychological. We know that you can sacrifice something valuable in the present and expect that you're negotiating with something that's representing the transcendent future. That's an

amazing human discovery. No other creature can do that, to act as if the future is real, to know that you can bargain with reality itself and that you can do it successfully. It's unbelievable.

It responds to sacrifice. It answers prayers. I'm not saying that any of this is true, by the way. I'm just saying what the cloud of ideas represents. It punishes and rewards. It judges and forgives. It's not nature. One of the things weird about the Judeo-Christian tradition is that God and nature are not the same thing at all. Whatever God is, partially manifest in this logos, is something that stands outside of nature. I think that's something like consciousness as abstracted from the natural world. It built Eden for mankind and then banished us for disobedience. It's too powerful to be touched. It granted free will. Distance from it is hell. Distance from it is death. It reveals itself in dogma and in mystical experience, and it's the law. That's sort of like the fatherly aspect.

The son-like aspect. It speaks chaos into order. It slays dragons and feeds people with the remains. It finds gold. It rescues virgins. It is the body and blood of Christ. It is a tragic victim, scapegoat, and eternally triumphant redeemer simultaneously. It cares for the outcast. It dies and is reborn. It is the king of kings and hero of heroes. It's not the state, but is both the fulfillment and critic of the state. It dwells in the perfect house. It is aiming at paradise or heaven. It can rescue from hell. It cares for the outcast. It is the foundation and the cornerstone that was rejected. It is the spirit of the law. The spirit-like aspect. It's akin to the human soul. It's the prophetic voice. It's the still, small voice of conscience. It's the spoken truth. It's called forth by music. It is the enemy of deceit, arrogance, and resentment. It is the water of life. It burns without consuming. It's a blinding light.

That's a very well-developed set of poetic metaphors. These are all...what would you say...glimpses of the transcendent ideal. That's the right way of thinking about it. They're glimpses of the transcendent ideal, and all of them have a specific meaning. In part, what we're going to do is go over that meaning as we continue with this series. What we've got now is a brief description, at least, of what this is.

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth." We know it's associated with the logos in this sequence of stories. We know it's associated with the word, and with consciousness, and we know that it's associated with whatever God is. And then I laid out the metaphorical landscape that, at least in part, describes God. Now we have some sense of the being that creates the heavens



describes God. Now we have some sense of the being that creates the heavens and the earth.

"The earth was without form and void"—that's that chaotic state of intermingled confusion—"and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, let there be light, and there was light." We'll stop with that because now we're ready to take a tentative step into the very first part of this book. It's important to have your conceptual framework properly organized so that you can appreciate where it's going and what it might possibly mean. And so, well, I've done what I can today to....what would you say...elaborate on this single word, I suppose. Hah. But it's a big word, you know, so...it's not so unreasonable that it takes a long time to get to the point where you have any sense of what it means at all. That is nowhere near...that is not...I thought I would get a lot farther than that. Hah. All right, thank you very much.

## II: Genesis 1: Chaos & Order

I thought, this time, that I would actually cover some of the Biblical stories, hopefully a number of them. As I said last time, I'm going to go through this as fast as I am able to. I want to do as complete a job as possible. Of course, the probability that I'll get through the entire Bible is very low, but we'll get through a lot of the major stories and the beginning of it. That's a good start. Assuming that this all goes well, maybe I'll try to do this same thing again in the fall, or next year—assuming that everything is still working out properly next year. It's a long ways away.

All right, I guess we'll start. Last week I talked to you about a line in the New Testament that was from John. It was a line that was designed to parallel the opening of Genesis. It's a really important line. I thought I would reemphasize it, because the Bible is a book that's been written forward and backwards in time—like most books, because if you write a book, of course, when you get to the end, if you're a writer, you can adjust the beginning, and so on. It has this odd appearance of linearity, but it isn't linear. It's like you're God, standing outside of time. That's your book, and you can play with time anywhere along it. The people who put the book together—or the books together—took full advantage of that. It gives the story odd parallels in many, many places and this is one of the major parallels—at least from the perspective of the Christian interpretation of the Bible, which, of course, includes the New Testament.

So there's this strange idea that Christ was the same factor, or force, that God used at the beginning of time to speak habitable order into being. That's a very, very strange idea. It's not something that can be just easily dismissed as superstition, partly because it's so strange. It doesn't even fit the definition of a superstitious belief. It's a dream-like belief, and what I see in many of the ideas in the Bible is these dream-like ideas that underlie our normative cognition and that constitute the ground from which our more articulated and explicit ideas have emerged. This idea's so complicated that it's still mostly embedded in dream-like form, but it seems to have something to do with the primacy of consciousness. This is one of the biggest issues regarding the structure of reality, as far as I can tell, because everyone from physicists to neurobiologists debate this. The stumbling block for a purely objective view of the world seems, to me, to be consciousness.

Consciousness has all sorts of strange properties. For example, it isn't obvious

Consciousness has all sorts of strange properties. For example, it isn't obvious what constitutes time, or at least duration, in the absence of consciousness. It isn't also easy to understand what constituted being in the absence of consciousness, because it seems to be the case—well, if a movie is running and there's no one to watch it...I know it sounds like the tree in the forest idea, but it's not that idea at all. If a movie is running and no one's watching it, in what sense can you say that there's even a movie running? Because the movie seems to be the experience of the movie, not the objective elements of the movie. There's something about the world—at least insofar as we're in it as human beings—that is dependent on conscious experience of the world. Now, of course, you can take consciousness out of the world and say, well, if none of us were here, if there was no such thing as consciousness, then the cosmos would continue running the way it is running. But it depends on what, exactly, you mean by the cosmos when you make a statement like that. There's something about the subjective experience of reality that gives it reality, and since we're all pretty enamoured at our own consciousnesses—although they're painful, because they define our being—it's not unreasonable to give consciousness a kind of metaphysical primacy.

It's a deeper idea than that because there's physicists—and they're not trivial physicists—like [John Wheeler](#), who believes that consciousness plays a constitutive role in transforming the chaotic potential of being into the actuality of being. He's not alive anymore, but he actually thought about it as playing a constitutive role. Then, from the neurobiological perspective, from the scientific perspective, consciousness is not something that we understand. I don't think we understand it at all. It's something we can't get a handle on with our fundamental, materialist philosophy, and I don't know why that is. It's quite frustrating, if you're a scientist, but it isn't clear to me that we've made any progress whatsoever in understanding consciousness, even though, well, we've been trying to understand it for hundreds of years, and even though psychologists and neurobiologists and so forth have really put a lot of effort into understanding consciousness from a scientific perspective in the last 50 years.

Anyways, what it seems to me is the idea that God used the word to extract habitable order out of chaos at the beginning of time, which is roughly the right way of thinking about it. It seems to me deeply allied with the idea that what it is that we do as human beings is encounter something like the formless and potential chaos. I mean, we're not omniscient and we can't just do whatever we want. That's always what we're grappling with, and somehow we use our consciousness to give that form. This is how people act. If you look at how they

regard themselves, it's how they act, because you say things to people like, you should live up to your potential, and you make a case that there's something about a person that's more than what is that yet could be if only they'd participate in the process properly. Everyone knows what that means, and no one acts like a mystery has been uttered when you say that.

You can see a situation in your own life that's full of potential. You're often extremely excited when you encounter something that's full of potential, because what you see is something that could be. You see a future beckoning for you that could be if only you interacted with it properly, and it activates your nervous system in a very basic way. We even understand how that happens to the degree that we understand how the nervous system works. The systems that mediate positive emotion are governed, roughly, by neurochemical dopamine, which have their roots way down in the ancient [hypothalamus](#), a very, very archaic and fundamental part of the brain that responds to potential, or the possibility of accruing something new and valuable. It responds to potential with active movement forward and engagement. And so we're engaged in the world as potential, and it looks like consciousness does that.

This is the main idea that I think has been put forth in Genesis 1. From what I gather, there's always three causal elements that make up being at the bottom of world mythology. One is the formless potential that makes up being once it's interacted with, and that's generally given a feminine nature. I think that's because it's like the source from which all things emerge and rise. It's more complicated than that, but then there's some kind of interpretive structure that has to grapple with that formless potential. I think that's the sort of thing that's alluded to by [Immanuel Kant](#) when he was criticizing the notion that all of information comes from sense data, which would be the pure empirical perspective. When you encounter the world, you encounter it with a cognitive structure that already has shape. It's already in you, this structure. Without that [a priori](#) structure, you wouldn't be able to take the formless potential and give it structure. It's akin, in some way, to the idea of God the Father, and I'll try to develop that idea more. It's the notion that there's something in all of us that transcends all of us, that's deeply structural, that's part of this ancient evolutionary and cultural process, that enables us to grapple with the formless potential and bring forth reality, roughly speaking.

And then there's the final element, and that element seems to be something like consciousness that actually inheres in the individual. So it's not only that you

have the structure: it's that the structure has the capacity for action in the world. It's like you're this spirit that gives the dead structure life. As far as I can tell, the Trinitarian notion that characterizes Christianity is something like formless potential—which is never given a status of a deity in Christianity—and then the notion that there's an a priori interpretive structure that's a consequence of our ancient existence as beings. The notion of a structure goes back as far in time as you can go. Then there is the idea of a consciousness that is the tool of that structure. It interacts with the world and gives it reality. That's the word, as far as I can tell.

The notion is that there's a Father, and that's the structure, and there's a Son that's transcendent and characterizes consciousness itself. It's the Son, the speaking of the Son, that is the active principle that turns chaos into order. It's such a sophisticated idea. There's something about it that's, at least, phenomenologically accurate. You do have an interpretive structure and you couldn't understand anything without it. Your very body is an interpretive structure. It's been crafted over, let's say, three billion years of evolution. Without that, you wouldn't be able to perceive anything, and it's taken a lot of death and struggle and tragedy to produce you, the thing that's capable of encountering this immense chaos that surrounds us and transforming it into habitable order.

There's the idea, too, of course, that's deeply embedded in the first chapters of Genesis, which is a staggering idea and certainly not one that's likely, that human beings, both male and female, were made in the image of God. That's a very difficult thing to understand, partly because the God that's referred to in those chapters has a polytheistic element, although it's an element that's moving rapidly towards a unified monotheism. But it's not also obvious to me why people would come up with that concept. I don't really think that, when we think about each other, we immediately think God-like. The notion that every single human being, regardless of their peculiarities, strangenesses, sins, crimes, and all of that, has something divine in them that needs to be regarded with respect, plays an integral role, at least an analogous role, in the creation of habitable order out of chaos. That's a magnificent, remarkable, crazy idea. And yet we developed it, and I do firmly believe that it sits at the base of our legal system.

I think it is the cornerstone of our legal system. That's the notion that everyone is equal before God, which is, of course, such a strange idea. It's very difficult to understand how anybody could have ever come up with that idea, because the manifold differences between people are so obvious and so evident that you

could say that the natural way of viewing human being is in this extreme hierarchical manner, where some people are contemptible and easily brushed off as pointless and pathological and without value, and all the power accrues to a certain tiny aristocratic minority at the top. But if you look at the way that the idea of the individual sovereign developed, it's clear that it unfolded over thousands and perhaps tens of thousands of years before it became something firmly fixed in the imagination. Each individual has something of transcendent value about them. Man, I tell you, we dispense with that idea at our serious peril. If you're gonna take that idea seriously—which you do because you act it out, because otherwise you wouldn't be law-abiding citizens—then you act that idea out. It's firmly shared by everyone who acts in a civilized manner. The question is, why in the world do you believe it? Assuming that you believe what you act out, which I think is a really good way of fundamentally defining beliefs.

That's the idea, that there's this God of tradition and structure. That's God the Father, who uses the Son, which is more of an active force and, primarily, something that's verbal. I think that's extremely interesting, because it's associated not with thought, precisely, but with speech. I think the reason for that is that there's something to speech that's more than mere thought. I think part of the reason for that is that speech is a public utterance and, at least in principle, speech is something that is shaped by the existence of everyone else across time. When you speak, your speech is put forward in the world as a causal element. It's also subject to criticism and cooperation and mutual shaping. So there's an idea here, too, that the cognitive processes that brings habitable reality out of uninhabitable chaos has this collective and public element, which is part of the reason, by the way, that I'm an advocate of free speech, let's say above all.

It is the case, for example in the Canadian Bill of Rights, that every single right has equal value. That's the theory. It's an idiotic theory, because it's absolutely impossible for a large set of rights to have absolutely equal stance. That cannot happen. There's no way that can ever work, but that is the legal judgment. I think it's a huge mistake. Free speech has this divine quality, let's say, that you can't escape from. It's the thing that manufactures everything else. I do think that the dream—that you could think of as encapsulated in the stories in Genesis—is the dream by which human beings dreamed up the idea that we would now consider consciousness. It took us a long time to figure out the word consciousness. It's not like it's bloody obvious. Who knows how many thousands of years, or who knows what struggles we had to undertake, to abstract out something like consciousness, and how we had to represent that

dramatically, or symbolically, or in a dream-like fashion, before we could actually formulate the term and localize that to some degree. It's very sophisticated.

John makes the case that there's an emanation of God, or an element of God, that the transcendent consciousness acts directly and in a sort of living way with the underlying potential of the world. I think that is phenomenologically accurate, and I do think that's the way we regard our lives. When you think about it, we tend to think that what you encounter when you are looking at the world is the material world, but that isn't how you act. You do act as if you're in a place of potential and also in a place of potential that you can actually transform, which is extraordinarily strange, because we do treat each other as if we're capable of bringing new forms into the world in some permanent manner. We treat each other as if we have free choice and free will. Perhaps we don't, but it's certainly the case that societies that are predicated on the idea that we don't, don't do very well, and societies that are predicated on the idea that we do, seem to do a lot better.

People tend to get very annoyed at you if you treat them like they're automatons that lack free will. There's something that people find very, I would say constraining, slave-like, about that: the demand that you don't have actual autonomy and, even worse, that you're not responsible for your choices. It's an insult to someone to suggest to them that they're not responsible for their choices. To do that to someone from a legal perspective, you have to argue something like diminished capacity: you're mentally ill, or you don't have the intellectual capacity, or you were addled by some substance, or you had a brain injury, or something, and that's why you're not responsible for your actions. Otherwise, part of the respect that you give to another human being is the assumption that they're responsible for their actions. If you do something bad, then you're responsible for it. But part of that, too, is that, if you do something good, you're also responsible for that. That also seems necessary because, I mean, it's gotta be more annoying than anything else you can imagine to strive virtuously to produce something of extreme value and then to be treated as if that was a mere deterministic outcome, and that your actual choices had nothing to do with that. People find that sort of thing extraordinarily punishing. I know that there are debates about all of these things, and debates about free will, and debates about the nature consciousness, but I'm trying to take a clear look at how people act, how they want to be treated, and then to trace it back to these old ideas to see if there's some metaphysical connection.

All right, so here's how the book opens: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." This is a hard narrative section to get a handle on because, in order to understand it properly, you have to actually look behind it. There are a lot of pieces of old stories in the Old Testament that flesh out the meaning of these lines. I can give you a quick overview of it. One of the ideas that lurks underneath these lines—although you can't tell, because it's in English. You have to look at the original language, and, of course, I don't speak the original language. I've had to use secondary sources, too bad for me. But the "without form and void," and the deep idea—you see, that's associated with this notion of endless, deep potential. For example, words that are used to represent "without form and void" are something like—I'm going to get this partly wrong—[tohu wa-bohu](#). Another one is [tehom](#). It's important to know this, because those words are associated with an earlier Mesopotamian word, which is Tiamat.

Tiamat was a dragon-like creature who represented the salt water. Tiamat had a husband named [Apsu](#). Tiamat and Apsu were locked together in a kind of sexual embrace. I would say that's potential and order, or chaos and order. They were locked together, and it was that union of chaos and order that gave rise in the old Mesopotamian myth, the [Enuma Elis](#), to being, to the old Gods first, and then, eventually, as creation progressed, to human beings themselves.

There's this idea lurking underneath these initial lines that God is akin to that which confronts the unknown, carves it into pieces, and makes the world out of its pieces. The thing that it confronts is something like a predatory reptile, a dragon, or a serpent. I think part of the reason for that—and this is a very deep and ancient idea—is that... This is where it gets so complicated to do the translation. It's partly how human beings created our world. We went out beyond the confines of our safe spaces—let's say our safe spaces defined by the tree or the fire—and we actively voyaged outward to the places that we were afraid of and didn't understand. We conquered and encountered things out there: animals, mammoths, snakes, and predators of all sorts. It was as a consequence of that active, brave engagement with the terrifying domain of what we did not understand that the world, in fact, was generated. That idea lurks deeply inside the opening lines of Genesis.

It's a profound idea, in my estimation. I think, also, that the way our brains are structured—and this is something that I'm going to try to develop more today—is the ancient circuits that our ancestors used to deal with the space beyond the



is the ancient circuits that our ancestors used to deal with the space beyond the home territory which they had already explored. Unknown territory is characterized by promise, because there are new things out there, but also by intense danger. We're prey animals, especially millions of years ago when we were very young. We had to go out there and encounter things that were terribly dangerous. There was a kind of, let's say, paternal courage that went along with that. It was the spirit of paternal courage that enabled the conquering of the unknown, and there's no difference between the conquering of the unknown and the creation of habitable order.

The thing is that, as our cognitive faculties have developed to the point where we're capable of very high levels of abstraction, the underlying biological architecture has remained the same. For example, when you're having an argument about something fundamental with someone that you love, you're trying to structure the world around you, jointly, to create a habitable space that you can both exist within. You're using the abstracted version of the same circuits. You're using the same circuits that our archaic ancestors would have used when they would have went out into the unknown itself to encounter beasts, predators, and geographical unknowns. It's the same circuit. It's just that we do it abstractly now instead of concretely. But, of course, it has to be the same circuit, because evolution is a very conservative force. What else would it be? This is also why I think it's so easy for us to demonize those people who are our enemies. Our enemies confront us with what we don't want to see, and, because of that, our first response is to use snake detection circuitry on them. That accounts for our almost immediate capacity to demonize. There's a reason for that. It's not a trivial thing. First of all, it's a very fast response. And second of all, it's a response that's worked for a very, very, very long time.

One of the variants of the hero—and I would consider a variant of the hero like a fragment of the picture of God—is the heroic warrior who slays the enemy. Of course, that's not precisely a politically correct representation of a hero in modern times, and no wonder, but it's still something that you go watch in movies all the time and admire. It's one of the most—how many plots are there? Romance and adventure, that's about it. Most of the adventure genre is, well, there's some enemy that's lurking in some form—it could be human, it could be alien—and someone rises up to go and confront it and maintain order. There's no getting away from that story. If you don't have that in your own life, you play a video game where that's happening, or you watch a movie where that's happening, or you read a book where that's happening. It captures you, even if you're atheistic and your only religion is Star Wars. It still captures your

imagination. You act like someone who's possessed by religious fervor when you line up for three days to be the first one into the theatre—and all the while claiming that you're atheistic to the core.

It's hard to get a grip on what "without form and void" exactly means. I can give you another kind of example of how you would experience the formless chaos of potential in your own lives, and even how the order that you currently inhabit can dissolve into that. In [Dante's Inferno](#), he outlined the levels of hell. Dante was trying to get to the bottom of what constituted evil in this representation. It's a work of psychology, and he's thinking, well, there are various ways to behave reprehensibly, but there's a hierarchy of reprehensible behaviour, and there's something absolutely the worst at the bottom. Dante believed that it was betrayal. I think that's right, because one of the things that enables long-term, peaceful cooperation between people is trust. I would also say that trust is the fundamental natural resource.

There's been some very good books written on the economic utility of trust. Societies where the default economic presupposition between trading partners is trust tend to be rich, even if they don't have any natural resources. You can see that, for example, with what happened with eBay, which I think was kind of a miracle. What should have happened with eBay was that you sent me junk and I sent you a cheque that bounced, and that was the end of eBay. But that isn't what happened. The default transaction on eBay was so honest that the brokers—you could hire brokers, to begin with. I can't remember what they were called, exactly, but you could pay someone a fee so that they would guarantee the transaction. You wouldn't send me junk and I'd actually send you a payment, and we'd pay 10 percent for someone to guarantee that. The default trade was so honest that those things vanished right away. That meant that all this frozen capital, roughly speaking, which were all the junk that people had lying around that someone else might want, instantly became money. The only reason that worked is that people trusted one another. Trust is an unbelievably powerful economic force, maybe the most powerful economic force.

Anyways, part of the reason for having a relationship predicated on trust is that trust is what enables us to look at each other without running away screaming. What I mean by that is that, if I trust you, then I don't have to take into account how complicated you are, because you're horribly complicated. A chimpanzee full of snakes: that's what a human being is. As long as you'll do what you say you'll do, then I can take you at your word, and your word simplifies you. You can take my word, and my word simplifies you, and then we can get like you

can take my word, and my word simplifies you, and then we can act like we understand each other, even though we don't.

But then, if that trust is betrayed, then all the snakes come forth very, very rapidly. All of you, I suspect, have been betrayed in one way or another. If you're in a relationship with someone and you trust them, then you make certain assumptions about the past, and you make certain assumptions about the present, and you make certain assumptions about the future, and everything's stable. You're standing on solid ground and the chaos—it's like you're standing on thin ice. The chaos is hidden; the shark beneath the waves isn't there. You're safe; you're in the lifeboat. But the instant the person betrays you...If you're in a intimate relationship and the person has an affair, and you find out about it, one moment you're in one place where everything is secure, because you predicated your perception of the world on the axiom of trust, and the next second—really, the next second—you're in a completely different place. Not only is that place different right now, but the place you were years ago is different, and the place you're gonna be in the future years hence is different.

All of that certainty, that strange certainty that you inhabit, can collapse into incredible complexity. If someone betrays you, you think, well, ok, who were you? Because you aren't who I thought you were, and I thought I knew you. But I didn't know you at all, and I never knew you. All the things we did together, those weren't the things that I thought were happening. Something else was happening, and you are someone else, and that means I'm someone else, because I thought I knew what was going on, and clearly I don't. I'm some sort of blind sucker, or the victim of a psychopath, or someone who's so naive that they can barely live. I don't understand anything about human beings, and I don't understand anything about myself, and I have no idea where I am now. I thought I was at home, but I'm not. I'm in a house, and it's full of strangers. I don't know what I'm going to do tomorrow, or next week, or next year. All of that certainty, that habitable certainty, collapses right back into the potential from which it emerged. That's a terrifying thing. That's a journey to the underworld, from a mythological perspective.

That is really something worth knowing, because journeys to the underworld are extraordinarily common in mythological stories—like the hobbit going out to find Smaug, the dragon, and get the gold, is the journey into the underworld. Journeys to the underworld happen all the time. Modern people don't understand what the underworld is, except that we've all been there and we go there all the time. We go there every time the solidity and stability of the world, that we've

erected at least partly through our speech, is shattered because some sort of snake appears. That's another way of thinking about it. It's a really good way of thinking about it, because no matter how carefully constructed a little habitable area that surrounds you, there's always something you didn't take into account. There's always something that can pop up its head and do you in, and make you aware of your mortality and age you, or even kill you.

That's the permanent situation of life, which is part of the reason why I think the story of Adam and Eve is archetypal: it's because we do inhabit walled gardens. A walled garden is half structure and society, and half nature. That's what the walled garden is. A walled garden is a place of paradise, warmth, love, and sustenance, but it's also the place where something can pop up at any moment and knock you out of it. I think part of the reason that story exists at the beginning of this collection of books is because it explains the eternal situation of human beings. We're always in that situation. We're in a walled garden—or we bloody well hope we are—but there's always a snake. It's even worse because, if there is a snake, we're exactly the sort of creatures that are going to do nothing but go and interact with that snake the second that we can manage it. It's definitely the case that, if you want a human being to muck around with something, the best thing to do is to tell them not to ever do it, not to have anything to do with it. This is, of course, something you know if you have teenagers, or even children, or if you know anything about yourself or your partner.

These stories are trying to express what you might describe as an unchanging, transcendent reality. It's something like what's common across all human experience, across all time. That's what Jung essentially meant by an archetype. You can say, well, we tend to think what we see with our senses is real, and of course that's true. But what we see with our senses is what's real that works at the timeframe that we exist in. We see things that we can touch and pick up. We see tools, essentially, that are useful for our moment to moment activities. We don't see the structures of eternity, especially not the abstract structures of eternity. We have to imagine those with our imagination. That's partly what these stories are doing. They're saying, there's forms of stability that transcend our capacity to observe, which is hardly surprising. We know that if we're scientists, because we're always abstracting out things that we can't immediately observe. But there are metaphysical, or moral realities, or phenomenological realities, that you can't see in your life by observing them with your senses. You can imagine them with your imagination, and sometimes the things that you

imagine are more real than the things that you see. Numbers are like that, for example.

There's endless examples of that. I would say—and this is also a good way of thinking about fiction—a good work of fiction is more real than the stories from which it was derived. Otherwise it has no staying power. It's distilled reality, even though, in some sense, it never happened. It's like, well, it depends on what you mean by "happened." It's a pattern that repeats in many, many places with variation. You extract out the central pattern. The pattern purely never existed in any specific form, but the fact that you pulled the pattern out from all those examples means that you extracted something real. I think the reason that the story of Adam and Eve—which we'll talk about in quite a bit of detail today—has been immune to being forgotten is because it says things about the nature of the human condition that are always true.

I can give you another brief example. People have a lot of guilt. There's a line in social psychology that claims that most people feel that they're better than other people. I just don't buy that. That isn't what I've seen in my life. Maybe I'm a bit biased because I'm a clinical psychologist and I see more people who are overtly suffering, maybe, than people do in general. Although, I'm not so sure about that, because you don't have to scratch very far beneath the surface of most people's lives before you find something truly tragic. And I don't mean the sort of tragedy that you whine about. I mean, your mother has Alzheimer's, or your best friend committed suicide, or you have a close relative with cancer, or you have a sick child. There's something wrong with you, because almost everyone has at least one really terrible thing wrong with them. If you don't, hey, you will.

That tragic sense of being is there with people all the time. It's also the case that, in my experience, I rarely meet someone who says, hey, I'm doing everything I possibly can. I'm a hell of a guy, and I can't see how I could possibly improve. You meet someone like that and you think they're narcissistic, and you're right. Most people don't feel that way. They feel like they could do a hell of a lot better than they are. They're quite acutely aware of their faults, and they don't feel that they're what they should be. What happens in the story of Adam and Eve, as well, is that, when people become self-conscious—at least that's how it looks to me—they get thrown out of paradise. Then they're in history, and history is a place where there's pain in child birth, where you're dominated by your mate, and where you have to toil like mad, like no other animal, because you're aware of the future. You have to work and sacrifice the joys of the present for the future, constantly, and you know you're going to die. You have all that weight

on you, and to me, again, that's just...How can anything be more true than that? As far as I can tell, that's just how it is, unless you're naive beyond comprehension. There's something about your life that is echoed in that representation.

We're such strange creatures. We don't seem to really fit into being, in some sense, and that's also what's expressed in the notion of [the fall](#). The existentialists said that people feel like they have a debt that they have to pay off to existence for the crime of their being. Maybe it's because we're acutely aware that we have to offer something of value to people around us, so that they can tolerate us while we're going about our business. But it seems deeper than that. It's that human beings seem to exist in a post-cataclysmic world. That's exactly what's represented in Genesis. It's very interesting because, in the Adam and Eve story, there's two catastrophes. There's the catastrophe that occurs when Adam and Eve wake up—which we'll talk about in detail—become self-conscious, and know that they're naked. "Their eyes are opened." That's the terminology that's used, and to have your eyes opened means to have an increment in consciousness, essentially, because eyes are associated with consciousness for human beings. We're intensely visual animals, and so the metaphor of having your eyes opened is the same as the metaphor of coming to consciousness.

As soon as Adam and Eve come to consciousness, they realize they're naked, and the classic interpretation of that is that it has something to do with sexual sin. I don't believe that. I don't believe that's what it means, although there are elements about that that are relevant. It's more like a dream that you're naked on a stage in front of people. That's not a sexual dream, unless you're some kind of strange exhibitionist, right? You want to cover yourself up and get the hell off that stage as fast as possible. To be naked in front of a crowd is to have the judgement of the social world focused on your self-evident inadequacies. That makes people self-conscious, and that's a real human state. It's associated with neuroticism in the [Big Five trait model](#).

People don't like that at all: they don't like having their fragility and vulnerability exposed to the group. It's one of the two major fears of people. One is social humiliation, and the other is something like mortality and death. Your typical agoraphobic, for example, gets to have both those fears at the same time, because she—it's usually a she—tends to believe she's going to have a very spectacular and exhibitionistic heart attack in a public place and make a terrible fool of herself while she's dying. That's a good example of the two archetypal

tears that characterize human beings.

I said that I'd try to approach these stories as if I didn't know what they were about, because that seemed right to me. Everything about them is mysterious. Why we have them is mysterious, and what the hell you're all doing here is mysterious. Carl Jung was very, very helpful in this. He faced these stories with a beginner's mind and presumed there was something to them that he didn't understand, given that they were at the very bloody bottom of our civilization, which is historically perfectly clear. They came out of the mists of time, and he wasn't satisfied with the Freudian idea that God was just the Father—the Marxist idea that religion was the opiate of the masses. It's like, if religion was the opiate of the masses, then communism was the methamphetamine of the masses, I can tell you that.

You've been betrayed by someone, and so you fall into that underworld of doubt about everything. It's a serious place, to be in that underworld, because not only do you not know where you came from, or who you are, or where you're going...That's bad enough. That's the underworld itself, but there's a subdivision of the underworld, the worst suburb, which is what I think hell is, essentially, from the metaphysical perspective. If someone really cuts you off at the knees, especially if they do it in a malevolent way...If you're gonna be betrayed, and you really want to be betrayed properly, you want to be betrayed by someone who's really out to hurt you. They weren't just being stupid. They were after you, for whatever reason. You plunge into that underworld space, and that's also when you start to nurse feelings of resentment, aggrievement, murder, and homicide—and even worse.

If people are betrayed enough, they start to obsess about the utility of being itself, and perhaps go to places that no one would ever want to go, if they were in their right mind. They develop and nurse fantasies of the ultimate revenge. That's a horrible place to be. That's hell, as far as I can tell. That's why hell has always been a suburb of the underworld: if you get plunged into a situation that you don't understand, and things are not good for you anymore, it's one step from being completely confused to being completely outraged and resentful, and then it's only one step from there to be really looking for revenge. That can take you places that, merely to imagine properly, can be traumatic. I've seen that happen with people many times. I think that anybody who uses their imagination on themselves can see how that happens. I don't imagine there's a single person in the room that hasn't nursed fairly intense fantasies of revenge, at least at one point in their life, and usually for what appear to be good reasons. It's no picnic

to get betrayed, that's for sure. It can shake your faith in being. But, if it shakes it so badly that you turn against being itself, that's certainly no solution, that's for sure. All it does is make everything that's bad even worse.

"And God said, let there be light, and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness." That's another fundamental separation: light, and darkness. Those are, in some sense, two of the fundamental elements of our conscious being. When it's light, we're awake and conscious, because we're diurnal animals. When it's night, well, then we're asleep. Our existence is bounded by light and darkness. We're up and alert when it's light. That's partly because we're highly visual animals—unlike most animals, because most animals use smell. We use vision. We're very strange that way, and vision is associated with enlightenment, illumination, the breaking of the dawn, the coming of the new day, and all of that. For light to be created is associated, in some sense, with the emergence of conscious being. That's another echo of that notion. The particular phrasing of the story, also, is important because it's, again, that God "said." That's the use of the word, or the active element of the structure that gives order to chaos. It's like the spirit of the structure manifests itself and produces the fundamental divisions of experience. That's what's being represented here.

"And God separated the light from the darkness. God call the light day, and the darkness he called night." And, again, the fact that things are named is also very important. You see this later with Adam, because God gives Adam the job of naming all the animals. It's sort of like the animals don't actually exist until they're named. That's another indication of the authors of the Bible attempting to come to terms with the fact that our cognitive faculties and our ability to speak have something to do with the way that we cast chaotic potential into actuality. We can't really get a grip on something before we have a name for it, which is why, for example, you all have names. Everything that you encounter has to have a name, because before it has a name, it's just part of the blurry background. You could say it exists before it has a name, and that's true, but it's also true that it doesn't exist before it has a name. As soon as you give something a name, its nature changes. You've transformed it into something that's not so much mere potential anymore. It's, at least, on its way to being actuality, and to being a tool. And so the act of naming is repeated continually in the first chapters of the Bible. The reason for that is this continued emphasis on the importance of consciousness, conscious articulation, and speech.

Speech is really something that does separate us in an important way from



Speech is really something that does separate us in an important way from animals. We haven't got very far teaching animals how to speak. The best we've managed, so far, is with grey African parrots. There's one of them that got up to a four-year-old level. That's mind-boggling, because how big is the brain of a parrot? It's like that big, and that bloody thing could talk, so that shows you how much we know about brains. We tried to teach chimpanzees to talk. They could kind of get somewhere with sign language, especially if you started when they were young, but they don't have the capacity for language like we do. They were never able to really pass it on to the next generation, which is, obviously, a critical element of really having that ability.

As human beings, we've used our linguistic capacity to parse up the world in a new way, and to conceptualize it in a new way. You can say that we're just like ants, on this little, trivial planet out on the edge of one of a hundred million galaxies, and that what's happening here has no cosmic significance, but that's an arbitrary proposition. We're very complicated things, and whatever's going on, on this planet, has to do with conscious reality. The transformations of consciousness, for all we know, might be the most important things that happen everywhere.

There's no reason to consider consciousness a trivial phenomena. It's taken 3.5 billion years for you to develop the brain that you've developed. Human beings are amazing creatures. Just a casual walk through YouTube, and all those crazy kids that climb cranes and do that..what's that called...Yea, parkour. Man, that stuff's unbelievable. Human beings are crazy, crazy animals. There's almost nothing we can't do. I'm very loathe to assume that the transformations of consciousness that are described in the early stories in the Biblical accounts are somehow cosmically trivial. It doesn't strike me that way, and it's certainly not self-evident. Even if they are cosmically trivial, and the rocks don't care what you think, well, who cares what the rocks think? First, they don't think, so I don't see why that's exactly relevant. Even if it's all the same to the cosmos—which is something that I doubt—it's certainly not just all the same to you, because your consciousness has a quality, and it matters.

[Heidegger](#) is a philosopher whose writing influenced me post hoc. I recreated some of the things that he had talked about in the '30s before I knew much about him. But one of the things that Heidegger said was that the fundamental element of human being, of human phenomenology, was care. He said that's the basic essence of your being, that you care about things, either negatively or positively.

To not care about something, or to hate it, is still to be involved in care. Even if the cosmos itself is neutral with regards to our existence, we're not. And we're the only things that we know of that are conscious, and so, well, we might as well go with that. There's no reason—see, I can't help but think that the constant attempts by people to trivialize the nature of their own consciousness has a dark side. I'm a psychoanalyst, so I always think that way.

First of all, if you as a being don't matter, then you don't have to do anything. It's a great justification for total lack of responsibility, and that really twigs something for me. People who are bent, let's say, or vengeful, or angry, are always looking for a reason why they don't have to be responsible for anything. Plus, it's a lot easier. The notion that consciousness is trivial immediately allows you to wander down that path, and so I'm skeptical of those claims. I also think there's a deep hatred of humanity that underlies those claims, as well.

I've heard that radically clueless environmentalists say things like, "the planet would be better off without people on it," which is something that... You just cannot say that. If you say that and listen to yourself, you should go to a monastery for like three years and never say a word, and have a shower every 10 minutes until you've learned your lesson properly. You can't utter a more genocidal phrase than that. And, of course, you always do it in a display of your care for the world. It's like, well, if we just didn't have any people... Well, we'll just line them all up and shoot them with machine guns. It's really sickening. It's appalling, and there's a hatred for humanity that's at the bottom of it. You can kind of understand why, because we're messy, we don't clean up after ourselves, we're like raping the rainforests and that sort of thing. But I do have some sympathy for people, because we're hell on mother nature, but she certainly returns the favor.

That's a good thing to remember. A lot of what we're doing is just bloody well trying to exist with a relative minimum of pain. We're doing our best to get as good at doing that as fast as we can. That's not an easy thing. There are lots of us, and life is bloody complicated. Again, if you scratch just beneath the surface of people—and this is something that's always, to me, been kind of a miracle—you find they're out doing their job, and maybe they're doing a good job at it, like some emergency room nurse. God, there's a job for you. Or maybe they work in palliative care. You talk with them and you find out that they've got like four serious problems in their family, and maybe they're diabetic, and yet they haul themselves out of bed in the morning and go take care of dying people. It's like, good God! People deserve a bit of respect for struggling forward and not

like, good God: People deserve a bit of respect for struggling forward and not always trying to make the planet a worse place when they're beset on all sides, constantly, by an unending series of tragedy. You'd think we could have a little bit of sympathy for ourselves as a consequence of that. We're not all rapacious, greedy monsters who are bent on just devouring everything in our path. It's a little bit more complicated than that.

Let's go to the next part of this. "And God said, let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters. And God made the expanse, and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. And God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day." That doesn't make any sense at all, really. I think I told you a little about this before. The world that's being created, in this particular account, is a phenomenological world. There's a disc of land, because if you go out in a field and you look around, you're on a disc of land. That's pretty obvious. And then there's a dome on top that's more or less held up by the mountains. Rain comes down, so there's water above the dome. Where else would the rain come from? Underneath the ground, there's fresh water. You can drill down and find that. And then, around that, there's salt water. That's the world. It's kind of an empirical world, because if you're a child and you just go out in a field and look at the world, that's sort of what it would be like. And so that's the world that's been created.

One of the things that is worth thinking about—this is something Carl Jung was very interested in—is that these old descriptions are half geographical and empirical—based on observation—and half psychological. One of the things Jung was interested in, for example, was astrology, but mostly for psychological reasons. There are stars up in the dome, and then, when you look at the stars, you can imagine the shapes of the stars. That helps you orient yourself, because as soon as you can see shapes in the stars, you can recognize the constellations, and you can orient yourself at night. But then the constellations become Gods, say, and then the Gods turn into a drama. The drama comes from within. It's the projection of imagination. When Jung was analyzing astrology, he was analyzing psychology. He saw the astrological narrative as the projection of the human imagination onto the cosmos. The same thing is the case with these stories. The world they describe is not the natural world, like a scientist would describe it, because these people weren't scientists. They didn't have the technology and the tools. For them, it was the world. For us, it's the way they saw the world.

We share that psychology, to a large degree, with those people. It's interesting to

know what the geographical substrate is, so that you kind of understand the stories. I like this picture. From a psychological perspective, it's a very famous picture. Basically, what you have here is the world as we know it. There's the dome with the sun and the moon on it, and the stars. If you look outside what you know, then you're out into this cosmic space. Those are like the wheels of the planets and the music of the spheres. That's the ever-present explorer who's gone beyond the domain that he can understand and is peering out into the unknown. It's a psychological picture, because you do know some things, and then outside of that there are things you don't know. When you're feeling brave, you put a foot or two out where you don't understand. There's frontier everywhere. If you're feeling heroic and you want to do something for the world, and you want to expand what you understand, you poke your head through what you know and you take a look at whatever structure is out there.

He's pretty smart, because most of him is still where it's safe. I would say that's a good thing, because if you jump right out there, well, then maybe you fall off the edge of the earth, and I wouldn't precisely recommend that, especially if you do it accidentally. To me, this is a recreation of the Daoist yin and yang symbol—serpents, really—with the white paisley, here. That's what you know. The dark paisley, there, is the unknown. The right place to be is right on the line between them, because you've sort of got one foot where you understand. That gives you security, but it's kind of dull because, hey, you know everything that's going on. That isn't what people are like. They don't want just security.

I love what Dostoevsky said in [Notes from the Underground](#). It's a great, great book. It was an early criticism of the notion of a political utopia. He said, look, if you gave people everything that they wanted—they had nothing to eat but cake and nothing to do but sit in warm pools and busy themselves with the continuation of the species—the first thing they would do was go half insane and smash everything up, just so that something they didn't expect would happen, so that they'd have something interesting to do. It's so right. The utopian notion that if you just had all the material stuff you wanted that you'd be... Well, what would you be? What would you do? You'd just sit on the couch and watch TV? I mean, you'd be... I don't know what you'd be. You'd be cutting yourself just for entertainment in no time flat, and that's the sort of thing that people do.

We're not adapted for security and utopia. We're adapted for a certain amount of security, because we are vulnerable, but mostly we want to have one foot out where we don't know what the hell is going on. That's where you're alert and alive and tense, and with it, I believe that it actually has something to do with the

alive and tense, and with it. I believe that it actually has something to do with the hemispheric structure of the psychology of your brain, because the right hemisphere looks roughly adapted to what you don't know and the left hemisphere—this is an oversimplification, but a useful one—is adapted to the world that you do know. The right place for you to be is halfway between them, and you can tell that.

You know that sense of active engagement you have in the world when things are working well for you? You're alert and on top of things and engaged, and you don't have much of a sense of time. The sense of the tragedy of life sort of recedes. That's when you've got one foot where it's secure and one foot out in the unknown. Your brain signals to you that you're in the right place by making what you're doing meaningful. That sense of meaning is actually a neurophysiological signal that you've got the forces of the cosmos properly balanced in your being at that moment. That's why it feels so good. What else could it possibly be? Our brain is capable of looking beyond our vision. That's what it's for. There's no reason to assume that that sense of engagement is anything but a real signal. You can reduce it. You could say, well, the problem with being where you know—only—is that you don't know everything, and that's going to be a problem in the future.

The problem with being where you know nothing is that it's just too much. You go into panic mode because anything can happen there, and you can't handle it. You've got to mediate between those two things. You want to be secure enough so that your physiology isn't revving out of control, and you want to be out there in the unknown enough so that you keep updating yourself constantly, constantly, constantly. That's the place where information flow's maximized. You know that because that's where you are when you're having a really interesting conversation with someone, or you're gripped by a book, or you're really into a movie—or maybe something that you do apart from your work, or maybe even in your work. You're into it, and that's because you are in the right place at the right time, and your whole nervous system is signaling that to you. I would say that's the sort of place that you should be all the time. Of course, you can't be, because no one's perfect. But that's the recreation of paradise on earth, something like it. You are in the right place at the right time, when that is happening—subject to certain restrictions that we can talk about later. Well, that's what this guy's doing. That's what I would say is akin to the action that God is taking when he's transforming the chaos of potential into habitable being. It's the sort of thing that human beings are supposed to act out.

"And God said, let the waters under heaven be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear. And it was so. God called the dry land earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called the seas. And God saw that it was good." Well, that's an interesting thing, too. There's a play written by a German named [Goethe](#). I can never say that properly. It's Johann von Goethe. I can't say it, but he wrote this play called [Faust](#). He wrote one part of it when he was quite young, and he wrote Faust II when he was quite old. He has a character in there, Mephistopheles, and Mephistopheles is the devil. He actually has the devil explain himself, twice, basically using the same words, which I really like. It was very profound, and, basically, Goethe's Mephistopheles says he's the adversary of the word. That's a good way of putting it, because that's how it works out mythologically. He's the figure behind the snake in the Garden of Eden—which is something we'll talk about more—but he has a sophisticated philosophy. He's not just some random troublemaker. He's got a deep philosophy, and his philosophy is quite straightforward and compelling. It's compelling, and people are gripped by it quite often—far more often than they think.

His philosophy is, well, look around at the world. It's like Ivan Karamazov, in [The Brothers Karamazov](#), when he's trying to disabuse his younger brother of being a Christian monk. Mephistopheles says, look at the world. I mean, you look around the world, it's nothing but a blood bath. It's suffering everywhere. Everything eats everything and people die terribly. They're cruel to one another, and the whole mess is nothing but a constant hall of terrible carnage and ruin and wreck. He says, you'd be better if it never existed at all. That's a very interesting idea, and I've seen that in people many times. That's something that comes to mind when someone is in the depths of despair. They've been betrayed, and they wander into the wrong division of the underworld. If you have a very sick child, for example, or maybe your whole family is suffering, as whole families do sometimes, an idea's going to come to you: good God, who put this mess together? Is it really worth it? Is it really worth the suffering? Suicidal people say, no, enough of this.

You have to be pushed a long way, generally speaking, before you'll actually commit suicide. You have to be in very, very desperate straits. Your answer under those conditions is that being is such that it would be better if it had never been. It's a very terrible philosophy, I believe, because I think what happens, if you act it out, is that you make the very things that led you to despair far worse. If it's reasonable to draw logical conclusions that suffering should justify your

desire to make being end, the answer to that can't be to produce more suffering. That just doesn't make sense. My observation has been that people who act out the Mephistophelian philosophy inevitably make suffering far worse. That raises the other spectre of, well, do they want being just to cease? Or are they just out for bloody revenge, at any cost? My conclusion has always been that the true motivation is, I'm going to make everyone suffer as much as I possibly can before I say goodbye to this place. If you read the writings of the kids who shot up the Columbine High School, they'll tell you exactly that. That's precisely and exactly what they concluded, and then acted out.

But, in this, God says that it was good. I've thought about that a lot, because the question is, well, is something better than nothing? That's a really good question. I've thought about two things in relationship to that. One is, maybe it depends on how it is that you are, right? It could be that there are ways of being in the world that justify the world, and there are ways of being in the world that make the world unbearable. I believe that the narrative that runs through the Biblical stories is precisely a dialog between those two types of being. The optimistic part of the story is that being requires limitation and suffering—there's no escape from that—but there are modes of being that allow that to be, perhaps, even more than tolerable. Perhaps there are modes of being that allow that to be good.

It's a straight and narrow road; it's a very difficult road to tread. I think that's possible. I'm not an optimist by nature, but that's one of the things that I've conceptualized and read about that I actually find plausible. It's certainly the case—everyone knows this—that there are ways that you can act to make things worse. Everyone knows that. And so, if that's the case, there has to be the opposite, right? There has to be ways you can act that can make things better. Obviously, you can act in ways that make things way worse. The question is, are there ways that you can act that make things really much better? I think that's the question: can we have our cake and eat it too? Can we have the being that requires limitation and suffering and also simultaneously transcend that by our mode of being? I believe that the Biblical stories are one of the human imagination's best attempts to address and answer that question. That's what the entire story is about. The first of it is the catastrophe of the collapse of self-consciousness, and the entrance of humanity into history. The rest of it is, ok, now we're in history; now we know that we're going to die, we know about our mortality, and we're conscious of our own being. Is there a mode of acting in the world that allows that to be justifiable? Or, maybe even more, that allows that to be triumphant? Maybe it's worth finding out.

That's the other thing that's so interesting: you've got this short time on earth, and there's lots of things that are very, very difficult to contend with. You have the problem of tolerating yourself, even, and all your insufficiency. One of the things that seems to be the case is that, if you adopt a sufficiently profound mode of being, if you attempt to do that, then the mere act of lifting up that weight is enough to justify the fact that you're insufficient and mortal, and bound by tragedy. I believe that, and I believe people believe that.

If you watch how people act, they look for people they admire—and they do admire people. It's a natural phenomena, and you see it starting with children. Children admire, and then they imitate. We look to people who seem to be able to bear the burden of being in a heroic manner. There's something inside of us that calls to that, makes us want to mimic that and to follow it. I think that's the deepest and most profound of instincts. I think it's right, and even if you're not so convinced on the positive end—because it's more difficult to be convinced of the positive—you can certainly be convinced on the negative end. There are ways of being that are so brutal and so reprehensible that merely to read about that is enough to traumatize you. I think that, if you're a person who hasn't lost their soul completely, you can't help but shudder away from stories like that.

[Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn](#) was the person who did the most to unmask the absolute horrors of communist totalitarianism. He believed that [Nuremberg's judgements](#) were the most important event of the 20th century. That was the judgement at the end of World War II that there were certain actions that no one was to undertake, no matter what their cultural background was. They were, let's say, crimes against humanity—that there was such a thing as universal evil. You can debate that—and people certainly have—but the problem is, if you debate that, then you have to say that there are conditions under which the sorts of things that happened, say, in the concentration camps—which would be the gassing of children after their torture, and their forcible removal from their parents, and all the terrible things that went along with that—is just ok; it's just an opinion; it's just something that happened, and there are circumstances under which that's justifiable. There's no transcendent good and evil underneath that argument; it's only a matter of practicality. It seems to me that that's not the right conclusion to draw. That's how it seems to me, and that's what Solzhenitsyn concluded when he looked at the Nuremberg trials.

The notion that it was good...Well, even if you don't believe that—because it's not as good as it could be—I would say it's incumbent on you, as someone who participates in the process of furthering creation, to act as if it could be good, at



participates in the process of nurturing creation, to act as if it could be good, at least, and to further that with all of your efforts. Partly because, what the hell else do you have to do that could possibly be better than that? What could possibly justify your existence more than that? And you know perfectly well that, if you have any sense at all, if you think clearly about it at all, that that's what you want to see in everyone else. You're desperate, and maybe you're cynical, and now and then someone appears that acts, at least momentarily, like a light in the darkness. That lifts your spirit up and gives you a little bit of hope, and maybe helps you continue on. That's obviously a call to being. It's a statement from your own soul that says, that's how you should be. Maybe, then, we get a chance to participate in what is good.

"And God said, let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to it's kind, on the earth. And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to it's kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day." I like that. These old pictures are interesting, because if you look, here, you got this halo around God's head, and you've got this split, again, between day and darkness. God's right on the border between the two. That's the sun. A halo is the sun—or the moon, sometimes. It's like a coin: you have the queen's head on the coin, and that's the queen on the moon. It's silver, and it's a symbol of value because the queen is sovereign and the moon is the sovereign of the night sky. Gold, of course, is the sun. Gold is pure because it doesn't mix with other metals. It shines like the sun, so it partakes of the sun. God partakes of the sun, because there's something about whatever he represents that's associated with consciousness, illumination, and enlightenment. It's that force of illumination and enlightenment that's right on the border between these two sets of phenomena, and that's kind of what that picture's trying to represent. It's a metaphor—that's one way of thinking about it—but it does, again, allude to the underlying idea that there's something about consciousness that's integral to being itself. "And God said, let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years." That's a remarkable bit of writing, too. You just think about how bloody long it took our cavemen ancestors to look at the night sky and start to figure out that there are repeating patterns, across years, that enable them to mark the seasons. I just can't imagine how they figured that out...the degree of careful observation that it took...I mean, we know people figured that out a long time ago because those great megalithic monuments, like Stonehenge, seem to be astronomical observatories. You see the same thing with the pyramids. People

were looking at the damned sky, trying to figure out—looking at God, because, you know, that's kind of what you're doing when you're looking at the night sky: trying to figure out the regularity, order in the universe. That's all compacted into this little line.

"And let them be for signs and for seasons—be oriented by the stars." Amazing. "And let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth. And it was so. And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night." So there's an idea of sovereignty there: that there's an analogy between the ruler and the heavenly bodies that light up the darkness. That's a really interesting idea, too, because it took us a long time to come to terms with—as I mentioned last week—the idea of sovereignty itself, and to decide what constituted valid power. It's not power: it's authority and competence, and not power. It's not dominance, either. It's more sophisticated than that, because the people that you want to rule aren't people who have power. Power just means I can hurt you, and you can't hurt me back. That's not what you need from a ruler, even though it devolves into that from time to time. What you want is the kind of wisdom that illuminates the darkness. To associate the sovereign with the heavenly kings of the light is a perfectly reasonable thing to do, from a metaphoric perspective. That's an ancient, ancient idea, and another example of how we're grounded in a dream.

"And God set them in the expanse of heaven to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good." Another emphasis on the fact that something is better than nothing. Maybe you could consider that the declaration of the cosmos is something like, well, it's better that there's something than nothing. How do you know that? I guess the answer to that is there's something instead of nothing. I know that's not proof, but it's still a remarkable fact that it happens to be the case, and no one does know why that is. Maybe we should go along with it, see what we can do with it, and see how we could make it better. We certainly could make it better if we were really committed to it, and we shook our resentment, and our anger, and our hatred. I know there's reason for all of that, because people do suffer terribly, but God only knows what being could be like if we all contributed to it to the best of our ability. God only knows what we could conquer, and what sort of magnificent cities we could produce, and what things we could eradicate from the suffering of the world.

There's this guy I read about—this is amazing. I don't remember his name, but he found out about this worm that was called the [Guinea-worm](#). The Guinea-worm is a really horrible thing. You can look it up, if you want, but I'll tell you a little bit about it, even though it's very distasteful. A Guinea-worm is a parasite that lives in Africa. It burrows under your skin, and it's quite long. It's about that long, and it's about that wide. It'll burrow underneath your leg, and then it's in there. Maybe it pokes its little head out a hole, which is one of its delightful tendencies. If you want to pull it out, it breaks, because otherwise you'd just pull it out and it would be dead. It doesn't like that, and so it just breaks off. Many, many people had this horrible disease. Well, you can't imagine what that would be like. You're part of the one percent and you live in North America, and thank God for that. You don't even want to think about it, let alone have it. He went to Africa and wiped the damn thing out. It's like, wow, great. It seems to me the planet's a lot better off without any Guinea-worms on it—even though that's Guinea-worm genocide talk. I'm still pretty happy about it.

That was one guy who thought, well, we don't need these things. Yea, fair enough. Good for him. He can die thinking that the world's a better place than when he first popped out, so good for that. I think that's a good aim: to think that, when you're on your death bed, you can look back and think, there's a little less suffering from here on out than there would be if I never existed. That's a lot better than the opposite, because it's certainly possible—say, if you're Stalin—to ensure that there's a hell of a lot more suffering than there would have been if you hadn't lived. We perfectly well know that people can manage that, and that many, many people try to do nothing but manage precisely that. It's hard for me not to think about that as some sort of metaphysical evil. I think it's the right way to look at it.

You have the sun, here, and the moon, here, as far as I can tell. Hah. Actually, I think this is the moon, over here. Hah. That's part of the Sistine Chapel, which is an absolutely remarkable. Part of the reason why I'm teaching about the Biblical stories is because the humanities have been decimated so badly. Again, I think that has to do with resentment and hatred, more than anything else. But I don't really think you can get a grip on the humanities and what they have to offer without knowing the Biblical stories, because they're the dream out of which the humanities emerged. Unless you have that background knowledge, that dream, then there's all sorts of things that are utterly profound that don't open themselves up to you. Dante's *Inferno* would be one of those—Milton's [Paradise Lost](#), which is an absolutely amazing piece of work. Milton wrote it because he

wanted to justify the ways of God to man. What an ambition that is. I mean, he was serious about that. He took the problem seriously. It's the Mephistophelean problem: well, this is rough business that we're involved in, and maybe we should just give it up. I think the world—the whole world—was deciding that in the 1980s, when we were deciding if we were going to engage in the ultimate nuclear catastrophe.

We were very, very close to that, a number of times. I think it was a collective decision, in some sense, on the part of humanity, that we might as well keep the whole awful game going, rather than just demolish it. Again, it's a dream, and trying to explain the nature of being and the nature of evil... You can't crack the damn thing without knowing the underlying stories. That's really too bad, because it's utterly profound. As far as I can tell, you need profound knowledge, because life is actually a profound problem for everyone. I mean, you can shelter back and live a very conservative existence, and, look, more power to you. I understand why you would do that, but it doesn't stop you from having to face the ultimate questions of life. They're right there, in everyone's face, at least in some point in your life. It would be better if you could confront them full on, and to deal with them properly, and to be a beacon of strength as a consequence of that.

The humanities is supposed to teach wisdom. Wisdom is what enables you to deal honourably with the tragedy of life. I can't see how you could think that was a bad idea. There's gonna be times when you're in an emergency room and prone to panic, and to cry, and to break down and to collapse—to be of no use to anyone around—and that's not the right way to be. The right way to be, in a situation like that, is to be strong and reliable, and I don't think you can do that without being wise. You can't be wise without putting yourself together, without knowing something about where you came from and what you're like. That's history and the humanities.

This isn't optional. "Man doesn't live by bread alone," and that's exactly the issue here. You see these magnificent works, it's not like Michelangelo thought of this literally. He was a genius, for God's sake, and he's trying to get at that profundity of human culture. I suppose that's why you have this patriarchal figure, here, and the cosmic role that consciousness and tradition plays in being itself. It's ennobling. Religious or not, hundreds of millions of people come from all over the world, to Rome, and go through this tiny chapel to look at this. There's something in it that everyone needs to see. It's not just beautiful. It's more than beauty. It's that which feeds the soul. Everyone feels that, even if they

more than beauty. It's that which feeds the soul. Everyone feels that, even if they can't explain it.

"And God said, let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let the birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens. So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth. And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day. And God said, let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds. And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind."

Kind means kin. To be kind is to treat others as if they're your kin, and so "according to its kind. And God saw that it was good." That's continually represented over and over. "God said." That's the thing that calls being into existence. "And God said it was good." That's the fundamental judgement about the nature of reality. One of the things that happens in the translation—in the movement, let's say, from the Old Testament to the New Testament—is God is obviously blessing creation in the beginning of this story, and then you have Old Testament God, and don't mess around with him, right, because he'll give you a good smiting if you get out of line, there's no doubt about that. He's kind of an arbitrary character, and lots of modern people think, well, how could you believe in a God like that? When I read that, I think, well, that isn't how the Old Testament people thought. They thought, you'd better look the hell out. Life is really difficult, and if you step out of line, you're gonna get flattened. God doesn't care, in some sense, whether you approve of him. Like, what the hell does that have to do with anything? Obviously, you don't approve. You'd better pay attention, though, because otherwise you're gonna be in real trouble. There's real wisdom in that.

Nietzsche really admired the Old Testament as a work of literature. He thought that the representation of the divine, as a representation of the essential nature of being, was extraordinarily accurate in its arbitrary and often cruel nature. It wasn't following a morality that human beings could really understand as moral. He thought that was very realistic, and I like that interpretation. But what happens in the New Testament is quite interesting, because there's an insistence,

all of a sudden, that you're supposed to act towards God as if he's nothing but good. That's such a strange thing, because you look at the world and you think, yea, really? Just good, eh? Well, the cancer and the earthquakes is kind of hard to fit into that picture, and the terrible things that happen to children, and all of that, is very difficult to square with the notion of a good God. But then, the underlying idea is that, if you act in that manner, it makes it more likely to be true. It's something like that.

I would consider that, in some sense, an act of both courage and faith. It's like you're going to make the case—like God makes at the beginning of the Bible—that being is, in fact, good. You can't see it because, well, you get to see all the things about it that aren't so good. That's not the point. It's a metaphysical presupposition. It's a decision to act that way: I'm going to act as if being is good, and to further that. The implicit idea is, well, there isn't any way that you can make things work out better than to do that.

There's a courageous element to it, which I think is also expressed, to some degree, in the idea of Christ's voluntary sacrifice of his own life. His presupposition was something like, I'm going to act as if God is good, and I'm going to play that out right to the end. That becomes something like a divine pattern. I believe there's wisdom in that because, again, most of the time that I've been wrestling with this sort of thing, I've always been looking at the opposite. I haven't been studying good: I've been studying evil, because evil is easier to believe, especially after the 20th century. I think you have to be blind not to think about the things that happened in the 20th century as evil. Some of the things that happened were so brutal that it's just absolutely unimaginable—well, unless you imagine it—and it's right there; it's part of the historical record.

I think, well, if there's something that's that terrible, it indicates, as clearly as anything, that there's also something that's its opposite. That's whatever it is that's the farthest away possible from that outcome. That doesn't mean we can exactly say what it is, because it's easier to grip, in some sense, what it means to torture and break and hurt, and not to be able to conceptualize so clearly how you would have to act if you were acting in the exact opposite manner. But, at least, it implies that it exists.

I see that pattern being laid out in this dream-like manner in the New Testament. It has something to do—and this is for sure—with the voluntary acceptance of mortality. That's the poisoned apple, right? The fact that everybody looks forward into the future to know that you're finite and so is everything that you

forward into the future to know that you're finite, and so is everything that you love. It's very difficult for that not to poison your existence. Well, there's no getting out of it, as far as we can tell, but there might be something like switching your attitude to it. You could say that's the price you paid for being, and the heroic thing to do is to accept that, and to not even accept it grudgingly—to say, all right, I'm going to go along with that. I'm going to accept that, and I'm going to act, nonetheless, as if being is good. Then, I'm going to see how things turn out. "God saw that it was good." It's an act of courage. There's an act of courage that's associated with that transformation of attitude. Even with regards to the notion that the world is good, it's a courageous attitude, especially given that there's so much evidence that makes that conclusion difficult to continually draw. But the alternative seems, to me, to be far worse.

There's God, again, with the sun behind him. He's associated with the solar consciousness. He's creating all these strange, wonderful creatures. People say, well, you know, the idea of God as an old man in the sky is primitive. It's much more better to think about it as a... "Much more better?" Jesus. Hah. Anyways, it's more sophisticated to think of the divine essence as a disembodied spirit, or something like that. But, you know, that's not so obvious either, because—as I already pointed out—there isn't anything that's more complicated than a human being.

The idea that the divine is something that's at least as complicated as a human being strikes me as something that's actually quite reasonable. I know it's a metaphor. Although, I don't know to what degree it is a metaphor, and it's also something that's embodied. That's also a very interesting notion, because it's become increasingly obvious, as we try to do such things as produce artificial intelligence, that it's very difficult to produce an intelligence—or, perhaps, a consciousness—that isn't embodied in some manner. It can't be just a spirit without form. I think that's part of the reason, too, why Christianity put so much emphasis, at the end of time, on the resurrection of the body. There's a drive to ennoble the idea of the body—not just the spirit, the consciousness that floats abstractly above the body. You can't just shed that part of you that's heavy and material, so to speak, and leave it behind as if it's of no value; you have to ennoble that, as well. That idea is also linked to the representation of God as a human being, and as a wise human being, and as something that's embodied. And so, at least from the metaphorical perspective, I don't think it's reasonable just to brush your hands across and say, well, that's primitive. I don't think it's primitive, at all.

"And then God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness." And it's "our," because this is part of the Priestly story. As I said, there's a number of sources for the Old Testament. In the Priestly versions, if I remember correctly, it's Elohim. That may be wrong, doesn't matter, but, precisely it doesn't matter because the notion is that the God who's in the background of this story has a kind of plurality of being. It looks like the idea of monotheism arose with great difficulty, across time, because there are lots of powers. The idea that there's a power of powers was something that wasn't easy for people to figure out. What's constant across sources of power? Well, some kind of meta-power, but it's hard to figure out what that is. That's what's being represented by the movement, as far as I can tell, from polytheism to monotheism. It's, first, the observation that there are powers that determine the destiny of people, at least in part, that you're subject to. Then, the idea that there's something common across all those powers that you can represent, partly, with the idea of the sun rising in the morning and fighting its way out of the darkness at night. That's associated with consciousness and sovereignty.

One of the things that bothers me about simple-minded atheism—and I would say that simple-minded atheism is of the sort that regards these stories as nothing but simple superstitions—is that it's very, very poorly informed. Whatever these stories are, they are not merely simple superstitions. They weren't conjured up by some cabal of priests to bamboozle the masses—even though they were used for that purpose, from time to time. It's much, much more complicated than that. They have a very ancient lineage, and they're tied together with all sorts of other stories. There's an emergent wisdom in them, and I think the right way to view them is as the birthplace of sophisticated philosophical ideas. You have to wrestle with these stories. I said, already, that I'm going to be as rational as I possibly can in my discussion of these stories, and not refer to anything metaphysical except when that's absolutely necessary. Although, I don't want to eliminate the possibility of metaphysical reality, because I think that's premature. But you have to take the stories seriously. If you're going to approach the problem properly, you can't just casually dismiss them. It's not appropriate.

"Let us make man in our image." That's a very interesting idea and, like I said, it's not easy to understand how it was that human beings came up with the idea that us, lowly creatures, were God-like. With the Mesopotamians, for example—and the Greeks were like this, too—human beings weren't God-like; they were playthings of the Gods. The Gods just tortured us for their amusement. Love, hatred, anger, and all these powerful forces. We were just playthings to the



nated, angel, and all those powerful forces... we were just playthings to the Gods; there wasn't anything particularly divine about us. The notion that, in some sense, we partake of the divine is a staggering idea. I don't want to underestimate the difficulty that there was in abstracting that, or the utility of that idea for our current mode of being.

"Let them have domain over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." It's interesting that there is more than one creation story in Genesis. In this story, males and females are basically created at the same time. Later, Eve is extracted out of Adam—and we'll talk about that—but not here. The two sexes are generated simultaneously, and they both carry within them the divine stamp, which is very egalitarian, very appropriate, and, I think, unbelievably advanced. That's what it looks like to me.

"And God blessed them." Well, that's a good thing. "And God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." There's God creating Adam and Eve. They're looking pretty happy about the whole thing. That's Michelangelo's famous Sistine Chapel representation. There's some cool things about this. I mean, you gotta wonder—this is an aside, and I don't know if it's a credible aside, but it's an interesting aside—what the hell is God doing in this thing? I mean, what is this, exactly? There's been some interesting answers to that, and this is one of them: There was a group of scientists about 20 years ago that remarked on the precise analogy between this structure and the brain bisected down the middle. Of course, Michelangelo was one of the first people who did detailed dissections, and so they felt that Michelangelo had put God inside the brain, for some reason. That seems, to me, to be associated with the notion that there's an analogy or metaphorical identity between the notion of whatever God is and the structures that give rise to consciousness.

I think we really underestimate the degree to which consciousness is both miraculous and not understood. You have what appears to be an entirely material substrate, yet here you are, aware and self-aware, and able to generate the world merely, in some sense, by looking at it. It really is remarkable that consciousness is dependent on something that wells up from deep within that material substrate that we don't understand at all. It's really a crazily remarkable thing. You hear a lot about scientific reductionism, but I'll tell you something that's kind of

interesting: the guy that discovered DNA...I think it was Watson. It was Watson and Crick, but I don't remember who wrote this book. One of them believed that DNA was so complicated that it had to come from space. He didn't believe it could have possibly evolved on earth. A lot of these people who are used as examples of scientific reductionism aren't like that, at all, when you actually read what they had to say. They were very aware of the limits of their own knowledge. DNA is something really quite spectacularly remarkable. It's an eternal substance. It's been around for a very long time, and the idea that we understand it is a very stupid idea. I would say that the same thing applies to the brain. We're scratching away at the surface of something we don't understand at all, so it's quite interesting. Maybe Michelangelo had enough gall to do that. It's certainly possible. He had enough gall to do dissections when the cost of that was death. He had to rob corpses, essentially, to go and do it. I would say he was not particularly politically correct. So that's kind of interesting, and there's another representation of the same thing, and that's a funny one. I had to throw that in. I don't know how many of you know this, but there's this joke in the atheist community—I think it might have been started by Richard Dawkins, but it was just as reasonable to believe in a flying spaghetti monster as it was to believe in God. That's a flying spaghetti monster, by the way. That's called Touched by his Noodly Appendage. It's not very sophisticated, but it is funny. "And God blessed them. And God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. And God said, behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of the earth, and every tree with seed in it's fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food. And it was so. And God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation."

I like that. I did a lot of coaching work with people who were fairly spectacularly successful. They were usually workaholics: the sort of people who would work 80 hours a week, just nonstop. That's just what they were like. One of the things that we were always trying to figure out was, how much should you work? One

answer is, you just work until you die. You just exhaust yourself, and that's not a good idea. And then you have to figure out why that isn't a good idea. It's gotta be something like, you don't want to do so much work that the amount of work you do interferes with the amount of work that you could still do, right? If you work like mad for two weeks and then you have to lie in a hospital bed for a month, that, obviously, isn't very productive. You have to figure out how much you can work diligently, and then how much you have to recuperate so that you can get back up and work again. People have basically settled on something like this, and given it the divine [imprimatur](#)—that's one way of thinking about it—which is, well, you can toil away for six days—and no wonder, because you have to work—but you should rest at least one day out of seven, because otherwise you don't appreciate life. That might be part of it. Plus, I think it's more a matter of iterability.

One of the things that defines morality is a capacity to repeat something. If something is properly structured in a moral manner, then you can do it over and over and over again without any degeneration. That's kind of like a relationship. If your relationship is negotiated, you can continue to negotiate it, and then you can have a relationship that lasts a long time. You can do it today, next week, next month, and next year. You can maintain it across time, and this, I would say, is the wisdom that's been garnered over God only knows what period of time—to say, look, even God needed to take a break and appreciate what was going on. It's not such a bad thing for people to follow that pattern. It's a good thing for modern people to know. Even though we're very wealthy by historical standards, our capacity to relax isn't exactly what it could be. I think that's really hard on people.

I'm going to go over, again, the idea of the attributes of God. I talked about that a little bit last week, but I want to return to it. I think it's worth dwelling on, a little, because we're trying to figure out what it is people were trying to formulate when they were formulating these representations. We've come to the conclusion that there is an attempt to abstract out the nature of power from specific aspects of power, and there's some attempt to associate that with consciousness—as that which gives rise to being itself—and there's some attempt to associate that consciousness with something that has a cosmic quality, whatever that might mean. It's a statement that it has a cosmic quality, rather than a discovery. It's a mere statement that there's something about consciousness that has world-generating significance, and also the implication that it's associated with human beings, as well. It's a very interesting idea of

propositions, and I don't believe that they are simply refutable. It's a perfectly coherent argument, even though it's primarily made metaphorically. Once again, I want to build up the framework of associations around the idea of God.

This is one of the things that Freud did when he was interpreting dreams, and it is quite useful. If someone comes to me with a dream, then I have them tell me the whole dream, and then I get them to repeat it, line by line. Whenever they say a line and there's an object in it, or a person, or something like that, I ask them what that makes them remember, or what that thing means to them, or what comes to mind. That's the associational technique, and it's predicated on the idea that your memory works by association—if you're daydreaming, you go from one thing to another like a conversation does—that you can take an idea that's at the centre of a web of associations and, by attracting the associations, you can zero in on what the idea might mean. Jung expanded that by amplifying the dream, by thinking about the narrative, or literary, or mythological similarities that might be associated with the narrative structure of the dream. I think that can be unbelievably useful.

The dream is an idea that's trying to come to birth. It's partly formulated and, if you discuss it and amplify it, you could speed along its transformation into a more articulated idea. With one foot in the unknown, your brain is trying to formulate what's out there in the unknown, and to make it concrete, but it doesn't do that in one fell swoop; it doesn't just take potential and turn it into articulated ideas. It has to dream up what's out there first, project its imagination out there, get a handle on what it might be. That's represented in the dream, and if you analyze the dream, you can make it more articulate. That's what we're going to do with the attributes of God, to build up the representational structure.

The hypothesis is that God is an abstracted ideal, formulated, in large part, to dissociate the ideal from any particular incarnations, or man, or ruler. The underlying idea is that, when the ruler becomes the ideal, the state turns into Biblical Egypt. The Biblical Egypt is a tyranny. There's a very, very solid idea in the Old Testament that, I think, took people God only knows how long to figure out: if you confuse the notion of sovereignty with the current sovereign, then your culture immediately degenerates into a totalitarian state and turns to stone. That was deadly, and then you were slaves. The thing was going to collapse, as well. No matter how big and grandiose, as soon as the ruler became the concrete incarnation of the ideal, there was no distinction between the man and the divine notion of the ideal. Then the society was doomed. I think that's true; it's as simple as that. I think we saw more than enough evidence of that in

the 20th century, and we're certainly seeing the same thing repeating itself now. When the ruler becomes the ideal, the state turns into Biblical Egypt, and Biblical Egypt is the archetypal tyranny.

What is God like? From the Christian perspective, there's three elements. One seems to have something to do with tradition, and so that's God the Father. That's partly the embodiment, I would say, of the human being. That's an ancient, ancient thing. It's also, partly, the embodiment of the tradition of human beings, which is also a very ancient thing, and that's the structure. As I said, it's the structure that consciousness emerges from that enables us to grapple with the unknown as such. And then there's the intermediary between that and Christ—that's the Holy Spirit, the bird. That's the spirit in a more abstracted sense. I would say that's probably as close Christianity ever got to the notion of disembodied consciousness, something like that. And then there's the notion of the suffering individual. That's a very complicated idea. There's this idea—an old idea, and I believe this was originally a Jewish idea—that something with the attributes of God—omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence—lacks something. It's like a Zen koan. It's a really interesting idea, because what in the world can something like that lack? The idea is limitation. Something that's everything lacks limitation. When I first encountered that, it just blew me away. It was such a brilliant, brilliant realization that there are advantages to not being able to do things—partly because it gives you something to do. I suppose that's a big part of it.

If you had everything you wanted at every moment at your fingertips, well, there's no story. It's funny because that happened to superman, the cartoon character. By the 1980s, he could juggle planets. He could bounce hydrogen bombs off him and be fine. Everyone got bored because, well, what are you going to do to superman? You lob a hydrogen bomb at him and he brushes it off and combs his hair, and that's the end of that. The whole cartoon series basically died because he didn't have any flaws. There's no story without the limitation. I think that's an absolutely remarkable idea. Part of the notion of Christ—and this is something that I've puzzled over for a long time, and I learned a lot of this from Jung—is that there's an idea in Christianity that there's consciousness, which, in some sense, is eternal. It stretches from the beginning of time to the end of time. It's this abstracted notion, but it lacks a certain kind of reality because it's not instantiated in a specific time and place in history. And so the idea of the Son, the third part of the Trinity—or one of the three parts of the Trinity—is the notion that tradition and consciousness also has to be embedded

in history, in a particular time and place.

There's the archetypal embeddedness, and that would be the incarnation. That's the perfect man who accepts his mortality and acts in a virtuous manner. It's the archetypal story of every individual, as well. There's a very strong strain in Christianity—I would say this is more pronounced in orthodox Christianity—that the proper path of life is to take the tradition and the spirit that's associated with consciousness and to act it out in your life, in your own personal life, in a manner that's analogous to the manner in which Christ acted it out in his life. What that means, in part, is the acceptance of the tragic preconditions of existence. That's partly betrayal—by friends, by family, and by the state—and it's partly punishment for sins that you did not commit, as well as the ones you did commit. What the notion is, is that your duty, let's say, and the way to set things right in the cosmos, is to accept that as a necessary precondition for being, and to act virtuously despite that. That's a very, very powerful idea, as far as I'm concerned.

The world's a weird a place, and I've seen some very strange things in my life. I've dealt with some people who weren't on a good path. One of the things that was really interesting about being around people like that was that it was like they were surrounded by a gravitational field, of sorts—I'm speaking metaphorically, obviously. Their world view was so warped and twisted that, if you came within contact of them, all of a sudden you started to play a part in their drama. It was almost inevitable: they would manoeuvre and manipulate and interpret in a way that made you into the villain in their story, no matter what it was that you wanted to do. Unless you've encountered something like that—and many of you probably have—you don't know how powerful a pull that is. It's certainly possible that someone can act in like a gravitational object and bend things around them to fit their unhappy and tragic narrative. I've seen the opposite, too, where people were aiming upward with the best of their ability and, because of that, they had a positive effect on the people around them. That ordered things around them in profound ways.

The degree to which the cosmos would order itself around you properly if you got yourself together, as much as you could get yourself together, is an open question. I mean, we know that things can go very, very badly wrong if you do things very badly wrong. There's no doubt about that. But the converse is also true. If you start to sort yourself out properly, you have a beneficial effect on your family. First off, that's going to echo down the generations, but it also spreads out into the community, and we are networked together. We're not

associated linearly; we all affect each other. The degree to which acting out the notion that being is good, and the notion that you can accept its limitation, and that you should still strive for virtue—it's an open question how profound an effect that would have on the structure of reality if you really chose to act it out. I've seen things in my life that indicate that I do believe there's a metaphysical aspect to life, as well as the rational, practical element. I think there are times when those two things come together, and I've seen that happen. I don't think we know the limits of virtue. I don't think we know what true virtue could bring about if we aimed at it carefully and practically. The notion that there's something divine about the individual who accepts the conditions of existence and still strives for the good...I think that's an idea that's very much worth paying attention to. I think the fact that people have considered that idea for at least two thousand years quite seriously is also an indication that there's, at least, something to be thought about in relationship to that. That's kind of the Trinitarian idea.

This is interesting, because you have, here, God the Father, who's coming out of the this strange—this isn't the sky, exactly. You see this very often in these old pictures. It's not exactly the sky. Whatever the heaven was that people believed in, it's something that. It's like the sky opens, and there's a dimension beyond the sky. I wanted to show you this, too, just to show you that this isn't only a Western conception. It has something to do with mystical experience. There's a [Bodhisattva](#). It kinda looks like he has a hat, but that's not a hat: that's a whole bunch of Bodhisattvas, going back to eternity. This hole in the sky, here, is like a hole into time, and these things are recurring across time. It's the eternal recurrence of this redemptive archetype. The sky opens up, and you can see that thing recurring, and recurring, and recurring. That's the same idea, basically. That's the [Blue Buddha](#), who's a healing entity, sitting in a mandala, which is like a representation of paradise. It's the same idea: reality opens up and reveals this image of perfection. It's a universal conception and, well, I think it's a representation of the possibility of the metaphysical and the physical coming together in some sort of communication. It's something like that, anyways.

You have to remember that there's absolutely no doubt that people have metaphysical and religious experiences. That's an absolute fact. You can induce them chemically, and you can induce them electrochemically. Lots of people who have epilepsy have epileptic [prodromos](#) that are associated with divine enlightenment. Dostoevsky, for example, had epilepsy. That was really, I think, one of the things that made him a great author. Dostoevsky would have this

feeling that he was going to have an epileptic seizure. He said that the feeling, for him, was that the world was opening up, and he was becoming more, and more, and more enlightened. He was just on the verge of grasping the essence of existence, and then he'd have an epileptic seizure. The subjective feeling was that that much knowledge was just too much for him to bear. You can say, well, that was a neurological abnormality, and fine. But, God, he was Dostoevsky, so you can't just brush that off.

That's the Trinitarian idea, fundamentally. This notion, here, is the notion that the cross is a funny thing. The cross marks the centre. It's an X, and the X is the centre of the world—like the X that the cathedral is at the centre of the world. It's where you are. As a consciousness, you're the center of the world. That centre of the world is a place of betrayal and suffering and limitation. That's exactly what it is, and the question is, given that, and given the fact that you know it, what the hell are you supposed to do about it? I believe that's [Goya](#). What that representation implies is that you're supposed to voluntarily accept that, and then move forward in good faith and with courage. That's the notion, that you're supported by your tradition, and that's why you need your tradition, too. That's why you need to be embedded in your tradition, because without that, without the support of your father—and I mean that both practically and metaphorically—without that behind you, without the knowledge of you as both a biological and a cultural creature, without that depth of knowledge, you don't have the courage to do it, because you don't know what you are or what you could be. You're a historical creature.

Students ask me, sometimes, why study history? It's like, because history is about you, that's why. History tells you who you are. You can't tell who you are because you live a little while. How the hell can you figure out who you are? You need all this collective wisdom, all this dream-like information, all this mythology, and all this narrative, to inform you about what you are, beyond what you see of yourself. You're pummelled down, and people pick on you, and there's 50 things about you that are horrible. You've got a self-esteem problem, and you're sort of hunched over. You've got all these problems, and so it's not easy to see, let's say, the divinity that lurks behind that. Unless you're aware of the heroic stories of the past and the metaphysics of consciousness, I don't think you can have the courage to regard yourself as the sort of creature that can stand up underneath that intense, existential burden and move forward in courage and grace. Of course, that's part of the reason that I'm talking about these Biblical stories. It's 9:30, so we're going to have to stop.



### III: God and the Hierarchy of Authority

I'm really looking forward to this lecture. One of the things that just absolutely staggers me about these stories—especially the story of Cain and Abel, which I hope to get to—is that it's so short. It's like 10, 11 lines. There's nothing to it at all, and I've found that it's essentially inexhaustible in its capacity to reveal meaning. I don't exactly know what to make of that. I think it has something to do with this intense process of condensation across a very long period of time. That's the simplest explanation. The information in there is so densely packed, and it's not that easy to come up with a fully compelling explanation for that. One of the things that you can be virtually certain about is that everything about the archaic Biblical stories that was memorable was remembered.

This is kinda like Richard Dawkins' idea of memes. I often thought that Richard Dawkins, if he was a little bit more mystically inclined, would have become Carl Jung. Their theories are unbelievably similar. The idea of meme and the idea of archetype of the collective unconscious are very, very similar ideas. The Jungian idea's far more profound, in my estimation—well, and it just is. He thought it through so much better. Dawkins tended to think of meme as a sort of like a mind-worm that would infest the mind, and maybe multiple minds. But I don't think he ever really took the idea with the seriousness it deserved. I did hear him, actually, make a joke with Sam Harris, the last time they talked, about the fact that there was some possibility that the production of memes—say, religious memes—could alter evolutionary history. They both avoided that topic instantly. They had a big laugh about it, and then decided they weren't going down that road. That was quite interesting, to me.

I do really think that the density of these stories is a mystery. It certainly has something to do with their absolute impossibility to be forgotten. That's actually something that could be tested empirically. I don't know if anybody has ever done that. You could tell naive people two stories of equal length: one that had an archetypal theme, and the other that didn't, and then wait three months and see which ones people remembered better. It would be a relatively straightforward thing to test. I haven't tested it, but maybe I will at some point. But, anyways, that's all to say that I'm very excited about this lecture. I get an opportunity to go over the story of Adam and Eve, and the story of Cain and Abel. I hope we manage both of those stories today. Maybe we'll get to the story of Noah, and the Tower of Babel, as well, but I wouldn't count on it, not at the

rate we've been progressing. But that's ok. That's no problem. There's no sense rushing this.

All right, I want to finish my discussion of the idea of the psychological significance of the idea of God. I've been thinking about this a lot more. This lecture series gives me the opportunity, and the necessity, to continue to think about the hypothesis that I've been developing. The Trinitarian idea is the earliest emergence, in image, of the idea that there has to be an underlying cognitive structure that gives rise to consciousness, as well as consciousness itself. What I was suggesting was that the idea of God the Father is something akin to the idea of the a priori structure that gives rise to consciousness. That's an in-built part of us, so that's our structure. You can think about that as something that's been produced over a vast evolutionary time span. I don't think that's completely out of keeping with the ideas that are laid forth in Genesis 1—at least if you think about them from a metaphorical perspective. It's hard to read them literally. There's an emphasis on day and night, but the idea of day and night as twenty-four-hour diurnal daytime and nighttime interchanges, that are based on the earthly clock, seems to be a bit absurd when you first start to think about the construction of the cosmos. It just doesn't seem to me that a literal interpretation is appropriate.

You might not know it, but many of the early [Church Fathers](#)—[Origen](#), in particular—stated very clearly that these ancient stories were to be taken as wise metaphors, and not to be taken literally. The idea that the people who established Christianity were all the sort of the people who were Biblical literalists is just absolutely, historically wrong. Some of them were, and some of them still are. That's not the point. The point is that many of them weren't. It's not like people who lived two thousand years ago were stupid, by any stretch of the imagination. They were perfectly capable of understanding what constituted something approximately a metaphor, and also knew that fiction, considered as an abstraction, would tell you truths that nonfiction wasn't able to get at—unless you think that fiction is only for entertainment, and I think it's a very big mistake to think that.

All right, so here we go. The idea of God the Father is that, in order to make sense out of the world, you have to have an [a priori](#) cognitive structure. That was something that Immanuel Kant—as I said last time—put forward as an argument against the idea that all of the information that we acquire during our lifetime is a consequence of incoming sense data. The reason Kant objected to that—and he

was absolutely right about this—is that you can't make sense of sense data without an a priori structure. You can't extract from sense data the structure that enables you to make sense of sense data. It's not possible. That's really been demonstrated, beyond a shadow of a doubt, since the 1960s. The best demonstration of that was actually the initial failure of artificial intelligence. When the AI people started promising that we would have fully functional and autonomous robots and artificial intelligence back in the 1960s, what they didn't understand—and what stalled them terribly until about the early 1990s—was that it was almost that the problem of perception was a much deeper problem than anyone recognized.

When you look out at the world, you just see that there's objects out there—and, by the way, you don't see objects: you see tools, just so you know. The neurobiology of that is quite clear. You don't see objects and infer utility: you see useful things and infer object. It's actually the reverse of what people think. But, the point is, regardless of whether you see objects or useful things, when you look at the world, you just see it. You think seeing is easy, because there the things are. All you have to do is turn your head and they appear. That's just so wrong that it's almost impossible to overstate. The problem of perception is staggeringly difficult. One of the primary reasons that we still don't really have autonomous robots—although, we're a lot closer to it than we were in the 1960s—is because it turned out that you actually have to have a body before you can think. Even more importantly, you have to have a body before you can see, because the act of seeing is actually the act of mapping the patterns of the world onto the patterns of the body. It's not things are out there, you see them, then you think about them, then you reevaluate them, then you decide to act on them, and then you act. You could call that a folk idea of psychological processing and perception. That is not how it works.

Your eyes, for example, map right onto your spinal cord. They mark right onto your emotional system, so it's actually possible for people to be blind and still be able to detect facial expressions, which is to say, someone who's cortically blind—so they've had their visual cortex destroyed, often by a stroke—will tell you they can't see anything, but they can guess which hand you've put up if you ask them to. If you flash them pictures of angry or fearful faces, they show skin conductance responses to the more emotional laden faces.

Imagine that the world is made out of patterns, which it is, and then imagine that those patterns are transmitted to you electromagnetically, through light, and then

imagine that the pattern is duplicated on the retina, and then that pattern is propagated along the optic nerve, and then the pattern is distributed throughout your brain. Some of that pattern makes up what you call conscious vision, but other parts of it just activate your body. For example, when I look at this... whatever it is... Bottle! That's the word. I look at it, especially with intent in mind, and as soon as I look at it, the pattern of the bottle activates the gripping mechanism of my hand. Part of the act of perception is to adjust my bodily posture, including my hand grip, to be of the optimal size to pick that up. It's not that I see the bottle then think about how to move my hand. That's too slow. It's that I use my [motor cortex](#) to perceive the bottle, and that's actually somewhat independent of actually seeing the bottle as a conscious experience.

There's much more that can be told about that. [Rodney Brooks](#) is someone to know. He's a robotics engineer who worked in the 1990s. He invented the Roomba, among many other things. He's a real genius, that guy. Brooks was one of the first people to really point out that, to be able to have a machine that perceives well enough to work in the world, you had to give it a body, and that the perception would actually be built from the body up, rather than from the abstract, cognitive perceptions down. That turned out to be the case, and Brooks built all sorts of weird little machines in the 1990s that didn't even really have any central brain, but they could do things like run away from light. They could perceive light, but their perception was the act of running away from light. Perception is very, very, very tightly tied to action in ways that people don't normally perceive. Anyways, that's all to say that you cannot perceive the world without being embodied, and you're embodied in a manner that's taken you roughly 3.5 billion years to pull off.

There's been a lot of death as a prerequisite to the embodied form that you take. It's taken all that trial and error to produce something, like you, that can interact with the complexity of the world well enough to last the relatively paltry 80 or so years that you can last. This may be wrong, but I think, at least, it's a useful hypothesis: I think the idea of God the Father is something like the birth of the idea that there has to be an internal structure, out of which consciousness itself rises, that gives form to things. If that's the case—and perhaps it's not—it's certainly a reflection of the kind of factual truth that I've been describing. I also mentioned that I see the idea of both the Holy Spirit, and most specifically of Christ, in the form of the word, as the active consciousness that that structure produces and uses, not only to formulate the world—because we formulate the world, at least the world that we experience—but also to change and modify that

world. There's absolutely no doubt that we do that. We do that partly with our bodies, which are optimally evolved to do that, and that is why we have hands, unlike dolphins, that have very large brains, like us, but can't really change the world.

We're adapted and evolved to change the world. Our speech is really an extension of our ability to use our hands. The speech systems that we use are a very well-developed motor skill and, generally speaking, your dominant linguistic hemisphere is the same as your dominant hand. People talk with their hands—like me, as you may have noticed—and we use sign language. There's a tight relationship between the use of the hand and the use of language. That's partly because language is a productive force, and the hand is part of what changes the world. All those things are tied together in a very, very complex way with this a priori structure, and also with the embodied structure. I also think that's part of the reason why classical Christianity put such an emphasis not only on the divinity of the spirit, but also on the divinity of the body, which is a harder thing to grapple with. It's easier for people to think—if you think in religious terms, at all—that you have some sort of transcendent spirit that is somehow detached from the body, and that it might have some life after death. But Christianity, in particular, really insists on the divinity of the body.

The idea is that there's an underlying structure that's got this quasi-patriarchal nature. It's for complex reasons, but partly because it's a reflection of the social structure, as well as other things, and then that uses consciousness in the form—particularly of language, but most particularly in the form of truthful language—in order to produce the world in a manner that's good. I think that's a wallop, powerful, powerful idea, especially the relationship between the idea that it's truthful speech that gives rise to the good. That's a really fundamental, moral claim. I think that's a tough one to beat. One of the things that I've really noticed—and this isn't just me, that's for sure—is that there's a lot of tragedy in life. There's no doubt about that, and lots of people that I see in my clinical practice, for example, are laid low by the tragedy of life. But I also see very, very frequently that people get tangled up in webs of deceit that are often multiple generations long, and that just takes them out.

Deceit can produce extraordinary levels of suffering that last for very, very long periods of time. That's really a clinical truism. Freud, of course, identified one of the problems that contributed to the suffering we might associate with mental illness, with repression, which is kind of like a lie of omission. That's a perfectly

reasonable way of thinking about it. Jung stated, straight out, that there was no difference between the psychotherapeutic effort and supreme moral effort, including truth. Those were the same thing, as far as he was concerned. [Carl Rogers](#), another great clinician, who was at one point a Christian missionary before he became more strictly scientific, believed that it was in truthful dialog that clinical transformation took place. Of course, one of the prerequisites for genuine transformation in the clinical setting is that the therapist tells the truth and the client tells the truth. Otherwise, how in the world do you know what's going on? How can you solve the problem when you don't even know what the problem is? And you don't know what the problem is unless the person tells you the truth. That's something to really think about in light of your own relationships. If you don't tell the people around you the truth, then they don't know who you are. Maybe that's a good thing. Well, seriously. People have reasons to lie, right? I mean, they aren't trivial. But it's really worth knowing that you can't even get your hands on the problem unless you formulate it truthfully, and if you can't get your hands on the problem, the probability that you're going to solve it is just so low.

This idea has become more credible to me the longer I've developed it: The idea that there's...It's partly the idea that...Let me figure out how to start this properly. A friend of mine, business partner, and a guy that I've written scientific papers with—very smart guy—took me to task about using the word "dominance hierarchy," which might be fine for chimpanzees, lobsters, and for creatures like that, but not even for chimpanzees, so much. He thought that the idea of dominance hierarchy was actually a projection of an early 20th century quasi-Marxist hypothesis onto the animal kingdom that was being observed. The notion that the hierarchical structure that you see—that characterizes mating hierarchies in chimps, for example, that was predicated on power—was actually a projection of a kind of political ideology. That really bugged me for a long time when he said that, because I've really been used to using the word dominance hierarchy. He told me all that and I thought, argh, that's so annoying! It's so annoying because it might be right.

It took me months to think about it. I was reading [Frans de Waal](#) at the same time—he's a primatologist—and also [Jaak Panksepp](#), a brilliant, brilliant affective neuroscientist who, unfortunately, just died. He wrote a great book called [Affective Neuroscience](#). For rats to play, they have to play fair, or they won't play with each other. That's a staggering discovery, because anything that helps instantiate the emergence of ethical behaviour in animals—and that

associates it with an evolutionary process, which is essentially what Panksepp was doing—gives credence to the notion that the ethics that guide us are not mere sociological, [epiphenomenological](#) constructs. They're deeply rooted. And rats...They're rats, for God's sake! You can't trust them, and they still play fair. De Waal noticed that, in the chimp troops that he studied, it wasn't the barbaric chimp that ruled with an iron fist that was the successful ruler. He kept getting torn to shreds by the compatriots that he ignored and stomped on. As soon as he showed some weakness, they'd just tear him into pieces. The chimp leaders that were stable—that had a stable kingdom, let's say—were very reciprocal in terms of their interactions with their friends. Chimps have friends, and chimp friendships actually last for a very long time. They're also very reciprocal in their interactions with females and infants.

Frans de Waal is a very smart guy. I thought that was also foundational science, because it's really something to know that the attributes that give rise to dominance in a male dominance hierarchy...Let's call it authority, that might be better. Or even, shudder, competence, which I think is a better way of thinking about it. The attributes that give rise to dominance in a male competence hierarchy are not predicated on purely anything that's as simple as brute power. I think, too, that the idea—and this is a deeply devious and dangerous political idea, in my estimation—that male hierarchies are fundamentally predicated on power in a law-abiding society is absurd. I think all you have to do is think about that for like a month, say, which isn't that long, to understand how absurd that is.

Most people who are in positions of authority are just as hemmed in by ethical responsibility, or even more so, as people at the other levels of the hierarchy. We know this, even in the managerial literature, because we know, generally speaking, that managers are more stressed by their subordinates than the subordinates are stressed by their managers. That's not surprising. You want to be responsible for 200 people? You really want that? That's hard work, man. I mean, I know it's a pain to have a boss, because you have to care about what the boss thinks. Maybe the person is arbitrary, in which case they're not going to be particularly successful, but it's no joke to be responsible for 200 people. You have to be very careful when you're in a position of responsibility and authority like that, because you'll get called out if you make mistakes, constantly. It's not like, because you have a position that's higher up in the hierarchy, you're less constrained by ethical necessity. Well, if you're a psychopath, that's a different story, but psychopaths have to move pretty rapidly from hierarchy to hierarchy, because they get found out quite quickly. As soon as their reputation is shattered,

they can't get away with their shenanigans anymore. All of this is to say that there is something very interesting about the pattern of behaviour.

We know that sexual selection is a very, very, very, very powerful biological force—even though biologists ignored it for almost 100 years after Charles Darwin originally wrote about it, thinking mostly about natural selection. They didn't like the idea of sexual selection, because it tended to introduce the notion of mind into the process of evolution. It deals with choice. Imagine that you have a male hierarchy. We know that the men at the top of the hierarchy are much more likely to be reproductively successful than the men at the bottom. It's particularly true of men. You have twice as many female ancestors as you have male ancestors. I'm not going to do the math, and I know it doesn't sound plausible, but you can look it up and figure it out. It's a perfectly reasonable fact that actually happens to be true.

So there's twice as many female ancestors, because females, on average, leave twice as many offspring as men do. Any man who does reproduce tends to reproduce more than once, but a bunch of men reproduce zero. The average man who reproduces has two children, and the average man who doesn't reproduce has zero. The average woman who reproduces has one child. That means that there's twice as many females in your line as there is males. That's a big deal. Imagine that it works something like this: the men elect the competent men, who are admired, and who are given positions of authority and respect. It's like an election. It could be an actual, democratic election, but it's, at least, an election of consensus—or it's an election of, well, we're not going to kill him, for now, which is also a form of election. It's a form of tolerance.

Women, for their part, peel from the top of the male hierarchy. So you've got two factors that are driving human sexual selection across vast stretches of evolutionary time. One is the election of men, by men, to positions where they're much more likely to reproduce. The second is the tendency of women to peel off the top of the male dominance hierarchies, which is extraordinarily well-established—cross-culturally, even, if you flattened out the socioeconomic disparity, say, between men and women, like they've done in Scandinavia. You don't reduce the tendency of women to peel off the top of the male hierarchy, by much. Why would you? Women are smart. Why in the world wouldn't they strive to make relationships with men who are relatively successful? And why wouldn't they let the men themselves define how that constitutes success? It makes sense. If you want to figure out who the best man is, why not let the men compete? The man who wins—whatever the competition is—is the best man, by



definition. How else would you define it?

Why am I telling you all of that? The reason is because it seems, to me, that there's been this complex interplay across human evolution between the election of the male dominance hierarchy and sexual success. That's a big deal, if it's true. What would happen is that men would evolve to be better and better at climbing up the male hierarchy. The ones who weren't good at that wouldn't reproduce. But then it wouldn't just be a hierarchy, because there's a whole bunch of different hierarchies. You might say, well, are there commonalities across hierarchies? That's a reasonable thing to propose. They're not completely opposed to one another, at least. If you're relatively more successful in one hierarchy, it's more probable that you'll be successful in another. That's actually a really good definition of general intelligence, or IQ, and that's actually one of the things that women select men for. Men also select women for that, but the selection pressure is even higher from women to men.

General IQ is one of the things that propels you up and across dominance hierarchies. It's a general problem-solving mechanism. The other thing that it seems to do that, to some degree, is conscientiousness. There's also some evidence that women prefer conscientious men, and of course. Why wouldn't they? You can trust them, and they work, and so those are both good things. Then you think, so men have adapted to start to climb the male dominance hierarchy, but it's the set of all possible hierarchies that they're adapted to climb. Then you think, there's a set of attributes that can be acted out, and that can be embodied, that will increase the probability that you're going to rise to the top of any given hierarchy. And then you could say, well, as you adapt to that fact, then you start to develop an understanding of what that pattern constitutes. That starts to become the abstract representation of something like multidimensional competence, and that's like the abstraction of virtue, itself. None of that's arbitrary. That's as bloody well grounded in biology as anything could be. I think that's a really hard argument to refute.

One of the things I should tell you about how I think is that, when I think something, I spend a long time trying to figure out if it's wrong. I like to hack at it from every possible direction to see if it's a weak idea. If it's a weak idea, then I'd rather just dispense with it and find something better. I've had a real hard time trying to figure out what's wrong with that idea. It seems to me that it's pretty damn solid. The idea is that, if you watch what people do in movies, and so on, and when they're reading fiction, it's obvious that they're very good at

identifying both the hero and the antihero. You could say the antihero—the bad guy—is someone who strives for authority and position—generally speaking, not always—but fails. So he's a good, bad example.

If you take a kid to a good guy, bad guy movie, the kid figures out pretty fast that he's not supposed to be the bad guy. He figures out very quickly to zero in on the good guy. That means that there's an affinity between the pattern of good guy that's been played out in the fiction, and the perceptual capacity of the child. When my son was a kid, I used to take him to movies that were sometimes more frightening than they should have been. I never said, don't be afraid. I think that's bad advice for kids. What I said was, keep your eye on the hero. Keep your eye on the hero. And he was gripped by the movie, and often quite afraid of them—because movies can be very frightening—so he'd just zero in on that guy, hoping. You know what it's like in a movie. You hope that the good guy wins, generally speaking. Why do you do that? Where's that come from? Do you see how deeply rooted that is inside you? You bloody well go line up and pay to watch that happen. That's not an easy thing to understand, and it's so self-evident to people that we don't even notice that it's a tremendous mystery.

Is it so unreasonable to think that we would have actually, over the millennia, come to some sort of collective conclusion about what the best of the good guys are, and what the worst of the bad guys are? To me, archetypically speaking, that's the hostile brothers: Christ and Satan, or Cain and Abel. The hostile brothers is a very common mythological motif. Those are archetypes. Satan, for example, is, by definition, the worst that a person can be. Christ, by definition—this is independent of anything but conceptualization—is, by definition, the best that a man can be. As I've said, I'm speaking psychologically and conceptually. Given our capacity for imagination, and our ability to engage in fiction—and our love for fiction, and our capacity to dramatize, and our love for stories of heroism, catastrophe, and good and evil—I can't see how it could be any other way. That's part of the idea that's driving the notion of the evolution of the idea of God. Even more specifically, driving the evolution of the idea, at least in part, of the Trinity.

God is an abstracted ideal, formulated, in large part, to dissociate the ideal from any particular incarnation, or man, or any ruler. There's another rule in the Biblical stories, which is that, when the actual ruler—I mentioned this before—becomes confused with the abstracted ideal, then the state immediately turns into a tyranny, and the whole bloody thing collapses. It's so sophisticated. One of the things that we've figured out—and this was a hard thing to figure out—was that

things that we've figured out—and this was a hard thing to figure out—was that you had to take the abstraction, divorce it from any particular power structure, and then think about it as something that existed as an abstraction, but also as a real thing. It was real in that it governed your behaviour, everyone's behaviour, including the damn king. The king was responsible to the abstracted ideal. Man, that's such an impossible idea. Why would they have agreed to that five thousand years ago? One of the things that you see continually happening in the Old Testament is, as soon as the Israelites—for example, the Israelite kings—become almighty, the real God comes along and just cuts them into pieces. Then the whole bloody state falls apart for like hundreds of years. I think that's a lesson that we have not thoroughly, consciously yet learned. It's still implicit in the narratives, and we still haven't figured out why that's the case. Again, I think that's a hard argument to dispense with. We looked at this a little bit. The Trinitarian idea is that there's a Father—that's, maybe, the dramatic representation of the structures that underlie consciousness, or the embodied structure that underlies consciousness—and then there's the Son, and that's conscious in its particular, historical form. That's the thing that's so interesting about the figure of the Son. And then there's consciousness as such, and that seems to be something like the indwelling spirit. These psychological ideas came from somewhere. They have a history. They didn't just spring out of nowhere. They emerged from dreams and hypothesis and artistic vision, and all of that, over a long time, and maybe they got clarified into something like consciousness. But it takes a damn long time to get from two chimpanzees watching each other to a human being saying, well, we all exhibit this faculty called consciousness. I mean, that's a long journey. That's a really long journey, and there's gonna be plenty of stages in between.

One of the things I really like about [Jean Piaget](#), the development psychologist, was that he was so insistent that children act out and dramatize ideas before they understand them. [Merlin Donald](#), who is a psychologist at Queen's University, wrote a couple of interesting books along those lines, as well, looking at the importance of imitation for the development of higher cognition in human beings. The notion that we embody ideas before we abstract them out, and then represent them in an articulated way, is an extraordinarily solid idea. I really can't see how it could be any other way. If you watch children, you see that.

Think about what a child is doing when he plays house, or she plays house. The child acts out the father or the mother. You think, isn't that cute. She's imitating her mother. It's like, no. She's not. That's not what happens. It's very annoying when your child imitates you. You move your arm, and then they move their

arm, and you move your head—they copy you. No one likes direct imitation. That's not what a child's doing when the child is playing. What the child is doing is watching the mother over multiple instantiations and then extracting out the spirit called mother, and that's what whatever's mother-like across all those multiple manifestations. Then the child lays out that pattern internally and manifests it in an abstract world. It's so sophisticated. That's what you're doing when you're playing house, or having a tea party, or taking care of a doll. It's not like you've seen your mother take care of a doll. You haven't seen that. It's that you're smart enough to pull out the abstraction and then embody it. Certainly, the child is attempting to strive towards an ideal, at that point. She's not lighting her doll on fire—well, with certain exceptions; generally ones that we try to not encourage.

We also know that if children don't engage in that sort of dramatic and pretend play to a tremendous degree, they don't get properly socialized. It's really a critic element of developing self-understanding, and then also developing the capability of being with others. What you do when you're a child, especially around the age of four, is you jointly construct a shared fictional world. We'll play house together, let's say, and then you act out your joint roles within that shared, fictional world. That's a form of very advanced cognition. It's very sophisticated. I see in that—and Piaget did as well, and so did Jung, and so did Freud, and also Merlin Donald, these brilliant observers—the manner in which cognition came to be. They know very clearly that embodied imitation and dramatic abstraction constituted the ground out of which higher abstract cognition emerged. How could it not be? We were mostly bodies before we were minds, clearly, and so we were acting out things way before we understood them—just like the chimpanzees act out the idea that you have to act sensibly if you're head chimpanzee, or you're going to get yourself ripped apart.

You see that in wolves, too. When wolves have a dominance dispute, they puff up their hair at each other. They'll look big, and they growl and bark, and they are very menacing. One wolf chickens out and rolls over, puts up its neck, and basically what he's saying is, yea, I'm pretty useless. You can kill me, if you want to. And the other wolf says, yea, you know you're pretty useless, and I could tear out your throat, but tomorrow we might need you to help bring down a moose, so I'll keep you around. It's not like they think that; they act it out as a behavioural pattern. If you're an anthropologist, or an ethologist, and you went and watched the wolves, you'd say it's as if they were acting according to a rule. That often confused me, because I thought, do wolves act out rules? And I

thought, no, no, no. A rule is what we construct when we articulate a behavioural pattern. We observe a stable behavioural pattern and, when we articulate it, we can call it a rule. But for the wolves it's not a rule; it's just a stable behavioural pattern. We acted like wolf troops, or chimpanzee troops, for untold tens, and perhaps hundreds, of millions of years before we were able to formulate that pattern of behaviour in anything approximating a story or an image. It was even longer before we could articulate it as a set of ethical rules.

I'm dwelling on this. I know I've repeated some of this before, but it's so important. There's this tremendous push, especially from the social constructionists, to make the case that ethics is arbitrary, morality is relative, and there's no fundamental biological grounding in relationship to human behaviour, especially in the category of ethics. I think, first of all, that it's dangerous, because that means that people are anything you want to turn them into, and you bloody well be careful of people who think that. And second, I just think that the evidence that that's wrong is so overwhelming that we should just stop thinking that way. That's partly why I'm also attacking this from an evolutionary perspective. There's lots of converging lines of evidence that ethical standards, at least of the most crucial sort, not only evolved, but also spontaneously reemerged, for example, in the dramatic play of children. We need to take that seriously. Part of what we're doing here is trying to take that seriously.

Ok, so the idea there, at least in part, was that the Father employed the Son to generate habitable order out of chaos. I also think there might be something more proximally true about that, as well. Here's something that's cool about men: men are much more criminal than women—and that, by the way, does not look like it's sociocultural—partly because it peaks when testosterone kicks in around 14. It just spikes the hell up, and then it stays pretty high until about 27. For those of you who don't know this, standard penological theory holds that, if you have a repeat offender, guy just won't stop getting into trouble, just throw him in prison until he's 28. It's not like you're rehabilitating him, or anything. By 28, he's done with his criminal career, because the crime curve peaks at 15 and then falls down. Around 27, or so, it burns out. That's often when men get married, settle down, and stabilize.

One of the things that's cool about that is that the creativity curve for men is almost exactly the same. It ramps up when testosterone kicks in and then it starts to flatten out around 27. The curves match very, very closely, so that's quite cool. It's the creativity element of it that I'm particularly interested in, because creativity is, in many ways, an attribute of youth. I mean, if you look at that

sentence, and you stripped it of its religious context, what you would say is that the older people use the younger people to generate creative ideas and renew the world. It's like, yea, that's what happens. We also have no idea how many of the things that we discovered or invented as human beings were stumbled across by children and adolescents. They're much more exploratory, less constrained by their extant knowledge structures, and they're less conservative. That seems just right to me—right in an extraordinarily important way. It also means that, if you're an actual father, part of what you should be doing is encouraging your son. That is clearly the role. To encourage is to say, well, go out there, confront the chaos of the unknown and the chaos that underlies everything. Grapple with it, because you can do it. You're as big as the chaos itself, and do something useful as a consequence. Make your life better and make everyone else's life better. You can do it. Man, that's the right thing to tell young men. Talking to young women is more complicated, because they have more, let's say, issues to deal with. Their lives are more complicated in some ways, but that's definitely the right thing to be telling your son.

One of the things that I've really noticed recently, especially in the last 7 or 8 months, is that most of my audience has been young men. I've talked a lot to them about both truth and responsibility, and I think those are the two things that underlie this capacity. There seems, to me, to be a tremendous hunger for that idea. It's not the same idea as rights. It's a very different idea. It's the counterpart to rights. Life is hard, chaotic, and difficult. It's definitely a challenge. You can either shrink from that—and no bloody wonder, because it's gonna kill you, and it's no joke—or you can forthrightly confront it and try to do something about it. Well, what's better? And then you say to the person, look, you can do it. That's what a human being is like. If you just stood up and got yourself together, you'd find out by trying that you can, in fact, do that. I do think that's a great, core religious message. I think that's deeply embedded in this sort of idea.

All right, so this is what I've been telling you. This is something like how knowledge itself is generated: There's the unknown as such, and that's really what you don't know anything about. Generally, when encounter that, you don't encounter it with thought. You encounter it with a startled expression. That's the first representation of the absolutely unknown. It's something that's beyond your comprehension. It's terrifying, and because it's beyond your comprehension, you cannot perceive or understand it, but you still have to deal with it. The way you deal with it is that you freeze. That's what a [basilisk](#) does to, say, the kids in

Harry Potter. They take a look at it, and they freeze. That's the terrible snake of chaos that lives underneath everything. You see it, and that thing freezes you, because you're a prey animal. But, at the same time, it makes you curious. That's the first level of contact with the absolutely unknown: the emotional combination of freezing and curiosity.

That's reflective, I think, in the dragon stories. The dragon is the terrible thing that lives underground that hordes gold or virgins—very strange behavior for a reptile, as we pointed out before. But the idea is that it's a symbolic representation of the predatory quality of the unknown, combined with the capacity of the unknown to generate nothing but novel information. You can see that as very characteristic of human beings, because we are prey animals, but we are also unbelievable exploratory, and we're pretty damn good predators. We occupy this weird cognitive niche. One of the things we've learned is that, if we forthrightly confront the unknown—terrifying as it is—there's a massive prize to be gained, continually. That seems to be as true as anything is.

We know that one of the metaphors that underlies God's extraction of habitable order out of chaos at the beginning of time is an archaic idea. God confronted something like the leviathan, and that's one of the words for this serpent-like chaos creature that's often used in the Old Testament. There's this idea—that I think probably came from the Mesopotamians—that God, either in the Son-like aspect or in the Father-like aspect, is the thing that confronts this terrible beast—the chaotic unknown—and cuts it into pieces, and then, sometimes, gives the body parts to the populace to feed them. You can see a hunting metaphor there as well, but it's deeper than that.

So there's the absolute unknown, and the unknown is what you do not understand. It's what's beyond the campfire—even more anciently, maybe it's what's beyond the tree. It's out there, where you don't know, and what's out there? Crocodiles, snakes, birds of prey, cats, and all sorts of things that will eat you. But there's utility in going out there to find out what's there. Maybe you go, and you don't kill the snake—you kill the damn nest of snakes, and that makes you pretty popular, just as you should be. That accelerates your reproductive potential, let's say, and we're descended from people who did that.

We have this notion about how the world is structured that's deeply embedded in our psyche—really, really, deeply. Way, way down, way below the surface cognition. Way down in the [limbic system](#), in these ancient parts of the brain that

are like 60 million years old, or a hundred million years old, or older than that. Ancient, ancient brain structures. The first thing we do is we act out our encounter with the unknown world, and we act that out in a manner that's analogous to the manner that's presented as a description of what it is that God does at the beginning of time to extract habitable order out of chaos. I won't tell you about the other part of that, for now.

So you act it out first, and then you watch people who act it out, and you start to make representations of that. That's stories, right, and maybe you admire them. After a long time, you collect a bunch of those stories, and then you can say what that is—you can articulate it as a pattern. This is something Nietzsche also figured out. He did so many things first. It was quite remarkable. There was an idea that you first think, and then you act. It's completely, bloody rubbish, because you're as impulsive as you can possibly imagine. You're always doing things before you think, and sometimes that's a really good idea. So the idea that you see things, and then think, and then act...It's like, really? I don't do that. No one I know does that, and they certainly don't do that when they're emotional. You act first.

One of the things that Nietzsche said, very clearly, was that our ideas emerged out of the ground of our action over thousands and thousands of years. Philosophers weren't generating creative ideas when they were putting forward those ideas; they were just telling the story of humanity. It's already in us. It's already in our patterns of behaviour. Nietzsche was a genius, and that's one of his many, many observations of pure genius. There's the unknown, and then you act in the face of the unknown, and then you dream about the action—that's what you're doing in a movie theatre—and then you speak about it. Of course, once you speak about it, that affects how you dream, and how you dream affects how you act. It's not like all of the causal direction is one way, because it's not. These things loop. But it's still from the unknown, through the body, through the imagination, into our articulation. That's the primary mode of the generation of wisdom, let's say. You can easily map that onto an evolutionary explanation: the body comes first, right, and then the imagination—which is the body in abstraction—and only then the word. That's exactly how things did evolve, because we could imagine things long before we could speak. At least, that's the theory.

This is an image from my book, [Maps of Meaning](#). The idea is that this is the fundamental representation of the unknown as such. It's half-spirit, because it



partakes of the air like a bird, and it's half-matter, because it's on the ground like a snake. That's what you think is there when you don't know what is there. That's how your body reacts to what's there when you don't know what is there. You know that when you're alone at night, and maybe you're a little rattled up for one reason or another. Maybe you watched a horror movie, and there's some weird noise in the other room. It's dark; you're on edge, and you think you want to turn the light on and go in the room and see. Don't do that. Just open the door a little bit and sneak your hand in. Just watch what your imagination fills that room with, right? Then you remember what it's like to be three years old, in bed, and afraid of the dark.

I read a good book on dragons, recently, that had a very interesting hypothesis about them. One of the things the guy did was track—I can't remember his name, unfortunately—how common the image of the dragon was worldwide. It's unbelievably widespread. He thought that this was actually the category of primate predator. Predator is a weird category, because there's crocodiles and lions in it, and they don't have much in common except they eat you. It's a functional category, and this is the imagistic representation of the functional category of predator. His predator theory was, well, if you're a monkey, then a bird would pick you off, like an eagle. And if it wasn't an eagle, it as a cat, because they climb trees and give you a good chomping. And if it wasn't a cat, then you go down to the ground and a snake would get you. Or, maybe, a snake would climb up the tree—because snakes like to do that—and get you. So that's a tree-cat-snake, basically. Tree-cat-snake-bird, and that's the thing you really want to avoid. You don't want to come across one of those. The other thing it does is breathe fire, because fire was both greatest friend and greatest enemy of humanity.

We've mastered fire for a long time. It might be as long as two, three million years. [Richard Wrangham](#) wrote a book on that recently. I think it was Wrangham who wrote a book on when human beings learned to cook. That was about two million years ago. Cooking increased the availability of calories. You know how chimpanzees are kind of ugly? Shaped like a big bowling ball? They look really fat, and they're short and wide. That's because they have intestinal tracks that are like 300 miles long. The reason for that is because they have to digest leaves. You go out in the forest and sit there and eat leaves for a whole day, and see how that works out for you. They have no calories in them. So chimps spend about eight hours a day chewing. It's because what they eat has no nutritional value. They have to have this tremendous gut to extract anything at

all out of it. Human beings, at some point, just thought, to hell with that. We'll cook something. We traded our gut for brain, which more or less has worked. I think it's made us a lot more attractive, as well.

The idea here was, well, that's the basic archetype of the unknown as such. I like the Saint George version of this. It's so cool, because Saint George lives in a castle, and the castle is partly falling down. It's partly because there's a dragon that's come up. It's an eternal dragon, and it's come back to give everyone a rough time. This always happens, because the eternal dragon is always giving our fallen down castles a rough time. Saint George is the hero who goes out to confront the dragon, and he frees the virgin from its grasp. I would say that's a pretty straightforward story about the sexual attractiveness of the masculine spirit that's willing to forthrightly encounter the unknown. It looks like a straight biological representation to me. It's a really, really old story. It's the oldest written story we have. The Mesopotamian creation myth, the [Enuma Elis](#), basically lays out that story. I bet you the moviegoers among you, especially the ones that are more attracted to the really flashy sort of superhero movies, have probably seen the Saint George story like 150 times in the last 10 years. You never get tired of it, because it's the central story of mankind.

So you've got the unknown as such, and that is what you react to with your body. Existential terror and extraordinary curiosity are gripping you. And then you have the unknown-unknowns. Who's the political guy under Bush? Rumsfeld, yea. I think the reason [that phrase](#) caught on so well is because he nailed an archetype. There's unknown-unknowns, and there's known-unknowns. That dragon is the unknown-unknown. You have to be able to react to an unknown-unknown, because they can get you. You can't just plead ignorance, because then you're dead. That doesn't work. Human beings are the sort of creature who has to know what to do when they don't know what to do. That's very paradoxical, and what we do is prepare to do everything. We're on guard. We've prepared to do everything. It's very, very stressful, but also very engaging, and very much something that heightens consciousness. Maybe those circuits are permanently turned on in human beings, because we also know that we're going to die, and no other animal knows that. Sometimes I think that our stress circuits are just on all the time. I think that's part of what accounts for our heightened consciousness.

So you have your unknown-unknowns, and then you have the unknowns that you actually encounter in the world, like the mystery of your romantic partner.

When you have a fight with them, it's like, who the hell are you? You're not the absolutely unknown, because I know something about you, but you're the unknown as it's manifesting itself to me, right now. Then there's the known that we inhabit, and then there's the knower. The known is given symbolic representation, as far as I've been able to tell, in the patriarchal form of a male deity. The unknown as you encounter it is given feminine form. We won't get into that too much, but if you're interested in that you can look at my [Maps of Meaning lectures](#), and maybe take a look at the book. I think it's a good schema for religious archetypes. I've worked on it a long time. It seems to fit the Jungian criteria quite nicely. It maps nicely onto Joseph Campbell's ideas. He got almost all of his ideas from Jung, however. It also makes sense from a biological and evolutionary perspective, as far as I can tell. That's a lot of cross-validation, at least in my estimation.

Ok, so back to the hierarchy of dominance. I've done a lot of work in functional neurochemistry because I used to study alcoholism and drug abuse. To study alcohol, you have to know a lot about the brain. Alcohol goes everywhere in the brain. It affects several neurochemical systems. If you're going to study alcohol, you kind of have to study neurochemistry in general. I did that for quite a long time. I really got enamoured of a book called [The Neuropsychology of Anxiety](#), by [Jeffrey Gray](#), which is an absolute work of genius, although extraordinarily difficult. I don't know how many references that book has. It must be a thousand. Gray actually read them—and, worse, he understood them, and then he integrated them into this book. To read it, you have to really master functional neurochemistry, animal behaviourism, motivation and emotion, and neuroanatomy. It's a killer book, but, man, it's really rich. It's taken psychologists about 40 years to really unpack that book.

One of the things I learned was just exactly how much continuity there was in the neurochemistry of human beings and the neurochemistry of animals. It's absolutely staggering. It's the sort of thing that makes the fact of evolution something like self-evident—I do think it's self-evident, for other reasons that I'll tell you about later. I think random mutation and natural selection is the only way you can solve the problem of how to deal with an environment that's complex beyond your ability to comprehend. I think what you do is generate endless variants, because God only knows what the hell's going to happen next. Almost all of them die because they're failures, and a couple propagate, and the environment keeps moving around like a giant snake. You never know what it's going to do next. The best you can do is say, well, here's 30 things that might

work, and 28 of them are going to perish. If you're an insect, the ratio is way, way higher than that.

Anyways, lobsters are creatures that engage in dominance disputes. I think "dominance" is the right way to think about it. Lobsters aren't very empathic, and they aren't very social, and so it really is the toughest lobster that wins. What's so cool about the lobster is that, when a lobster wins, he flexes and gets bigger. He looks bigger because he's a winner. It's like he's advertising that. The neurochemical system that makes him flex is [serotonergic](#). You think, well, who cares? What the hell does that mean? I'll tell you what that means: it's the same chemical that's affected by antidepressants in human beings. If you're depressed, you're a defeated lobster. You're like, I'm small, things are dangerous. I don't want to fight. You give someone an antidepressant, up they stretch, and then they're ready to take on the world again. Well, if you give lobsters who just got defeated in a fight serotonin, then they stretch out and they'll fight again. We separated from those creatures on the evolutionary time scale somewhere between 350-600 million years ago, and the damn neurochemistry is the same!

That's another indication of just how important hierarchies of authority are: they've been conserved since the time of lobsters. There weren't trees around when lobsters first manifested themselves on the planet. What that means is these hierarchies that I've been talking about are older than trees. One of the truisms for what constitutes real, from a Darwinian perspective, is that which has been around the longest period of time, because it's had the longest period of time to exert selection pressure. Well, we know we evolved and lived in trees something along the order of 60 million years ago. We're talking 10 times as far back as that for the hierarchy. The idea that the hierarchy is something that's exerted selection pressure on human beings is not a disputable issue. How it's done it, and exactly what that means, we can argue about. But that sort of biological continuity is just absolutely unbelievable.

I didn't discover this. I read about it, and I talked to my graduate students about it. I used to take them out for breakfast. They were a very contentious, snappy bunch. They were always trying to one-up each other, and they were quite witty. For like six months—until it got very annoying—every time one of them one-upped the other, they'd stretch themselves out and snap their hands. That was very funny. It was really, very funny. So you see this in lobsters, and that's pretty amazing.

One of the other things that's really cool about lobsters is that—let's say you've

been top lobster for a long time, but you're getting kind of old, and some young lobster just wails the hell out of you, and so you're all depressed. Your brain is dominant, but you're a lobster; you don't have much of a brain. So now what are you going to do? The answer is, well, your brain will dissolve, and then you'll grow a subordinate brain. Yea. That's worth thinking about, too, for a couple of reasons. First of all, if any of you have ever been seriously defeated in life, you know what that's like. It's like a death, a descent, a dissolution, and if you're lucky, a regrowth—and maybe not as the same person.

That's what happens to people with post-traumatic stress disorder: their brains undergo permanent neurological transformation. They then inhabit a world that's much more dangerous than the world they inhabited to begin with. We also know that if you have post-traumatic stress disorder or depression, your [hippocampus](#) shrinks. It dies and shrinks. You can sometimes get it to grow back. Your hippocampus shrinks, and your [amygdala](#) grows. The amygdala increases emotional sensitivity, and the hippocampus inhibits emotional sensitivity. So, if you've been badly defeated, the hippocampus shrinks, and the amygdala grows. If you recover, the hippocampus will regrow, and antidepressants actually seem to help that. The damn amygdala never shrinks again. That's another lesson from the lobster. It's quite a terrifying one, but it's so interesting that you can relate to that. It's like, I get what that old crustacean's going through.

Here's the rats, and this is from Jaak Panksepp's work. He was the first guy who figured out that rats giggle. You might think, what kind of stupid thing is that to study? It's like a 50 thousand dollar research grant for giggling rats. He discovered the play circuitry in mammals. That's a big deal. It's like discovering a whole new continent. There's a play circuit in mammals. It's built right in; there's a biological platform for that, so it's not socially constructed. Panksepp found out that, if you take a rat pup away from its mother, it dies. Even if you feed it, even if you keep it warm, it dies. You can stop it from dying by taking a pencil with an eraser on the end and massaging it, because rats won't live without love.

The same thing happens to human babies. We saw that in Romania when there was that catastrophe after [Ceaușescu](#) in the orphanages. The orphanages were full of unwanted babies, because Ceaușescu insisted that every Romanian woman was constantly—so the orphanages stacked up with unwanted babies. Lots of them didn't even have names, and they were warehoused. Warmth,

shelter, food. Devastating. Lots of them died, most of them before the first year. The ones that didn't die were permanently dysfunctional, because you have to be touched if you're a human being; it's not an option. You have to be played with; it's not an option. It's part of neurodevelopmental necessity. You have to also play fair, because otherwise you produce a very disjointed child who isn't able to engage in the niceties of social interaction, which is continual play, in some sense, and reciprocity.

Panksepp noticed that male rats, juveniles, really liked to wrestle. They wrestle just like human beings wrestle: they pin each other, for crying out loud! That rat has just lost; he's down for a 10 count. What you do is, you take juvenile rats and find out if they want to play. You can attach a spring to them, and then they'll try to run, and you can measure how hard they're running by how hard they're pulling on the spring, and then you can estimate how motivated they are. So you can find out that a nice, well-fed rat who doesn't have anything on its mind will still work hard to enter an arena where he's been allowed to play before. He'll work for that, so the rat's motivated. The two rats go out there and they play. They're playing like dogs play, and everyone knows what that looks like if they have any sense about dogs. They kind of take a wrestling stance. Kids do that, and maybe you do that with your wife if you're going to play with her a little bit.

My poor wife, man. She had older siblings, and so she wasn't played with as much when she was little as she might have been. I used to like, you know, if you take a pillow and you motion to throw it three times, look out, a pillow is coming your way. So I'd go one, two, three, whap. She was completely dismayed at me. It's like, what'd you do that for? And, well, I eventually taught her that rule. The other thing I used to do is, you know, sometimes she'd come at me when we were playing around. I'd grab her wrists and knock her knuckles together. She'd get completely annoyed about that, and I thought, you just open your hands, right? Well, she didn't know that either—she hadn't been playing enough when she was a little rat.

You let the little rats go out there, and let's imagine that one is 10 percent bigger than the other. The 10 percent bigger rat wins, because 10 percent is enough in rat weight to ensure that you're gonna be the pinner rather than the pinnee. So that's fine. The big rat pins the little rat, and now the big rat is the authority rat. Then, the next time that the rats play, the little rat has to invite the big rat to play. The big rat's out there being cool, and the little rat pops up and does the whole

will you play with me thing, and the big rat will deign to play with it. But, if you pair them repeatedly, unless the big rat lets the little rat win 30 percent of the time, the little rat will not invite him to play. Panksepp discovered that. I read that, and it just blew me away.

That is so amazing because, well, first there's an analog to Piaget's ideas about the emergence of morality out of play in human beings. That was very cool. But the notion that it was built into rats at the level of wrestling... They're deeply social animals. They have to know how to get along with one another. Rats don't want their dominance disputes to end in bloodshed and combat, because if you're rat one and I'm rat two, and we tear each other to shreds in a dominance dispute, rat three is just going to move in. It's just not a great strategy. It would be better if we could settle our differences somewhat peacefully.

Anyways, Panksepp figured out that rats play. And not only do they play. They play fair, and they seem to enjoy it. He also figured out—this was really cool, too—that if you give juvenile rats attention deficit disorder drugs—Ritalin—it suppresses play. So that's worth thinking about. Why do you have to give juvenile human beings amphetamines in school? Well, because they need to play. Well, they don't get to play. They don't get to wrestle around. That's oppression, as far as I can tell. They don't get to wrestle around. That's fine. Feed 'em some amphetamines. That'll shut down the old play circuits. Here's the other problem: Panksepp found out that, if you don't let juvenile male rats play, their prefrontal cortexes don't develop properly. Surprise, surprise. You're not letting them mature. What else would you expect? That's something to think about really hard, I would say. There's some wolves having an authority dispute. A lot of it's posturing. Socialized wolves tend not to hurt each other during authority disputes. It's too dangerous. They have other ways of demonstrating who should be listened to. And there's chimps doing that. This is a really cool picture because this chimp—chimps don't like snakes, by the way. So, for example, if you take a chimp that's never seen a snake, and you show it a snake, it is not happy. It will get the hell away from that snake. If you bring a snake anesthetized into a room full of chimps, the chimps will all get away from that and then look at the body. They don't like that, either. If you bring a big snake into a chimp cage, even if the chimps have never seen it, they'll get away from it and then stare at it. Chimps out in the wild, if they see a big snake, they'll stand there and make a noise that means something like, holy crap, that's a big snake! And it actually means that, technically, and I'll tell you why in a minute. But they stand away from it and then they make this noise which means, oh my God, look at the snake! And then they'll stand there for like 34 hours looking at the

snake. Snakes are superstimuli for chimpanzees. This chimp seemed to learn how to take this dead snake and go scare other chimps with it, and that was partly how he established his authority. There's a threat, and, if I was around that chimp, I would take that threat seriously, because those things are no joke, man.

You see the same thing, here. I don't remember what kind of monkey that is, but they're engaged in agonistic behaviour. There has been recent research showing that, in higher order primates, there is snake detection circuitry that's built into them. It's not learned. It's deeper than that. Psychologists knew for a long time that I could make you afraid in a conditioning experiment much faster using a snake or a picture of a snake than with a gun or a picture of a gun. We can learn fear of snakes and spiders very rapidly. Then people thought, well, maybe we were prepared to develop fear of snakes or spiders. The more recent research has indicated that it's more than just prepared: it's that we have the detection circuitry built right into us. Well, why wouldn't we? That's really the issue. It's like, it's not really that much of a surprise—unless you think of human beings as a blank slate, and if you think that...I don't know, you should crawl out of the 16th century. That's how I would look at it. That's just gone, that idea. It's so wrong.

Maybe you can think about this as a dominance hierarchy, but wolves look for credibility and competence, as well. Chimpanzees don't like brutal tyrants, and so we'll talk about it as the hierarchy of authority. This is kind of how it starts to develop: these girls are negotiating the domestic environment, how to behave properly, how to share, take turns, and all that. They're negotiating the hierarchy of authority. If you're good at reciprocity, sometimes you're the authority and sometimes the other person is the authority. That's fair play, right? These boys are doing the same thing, and you see they're all smiling away. It looks like aggressive behavior. People who are not very attentive, and who are paranoid, and who don't like human beings, confuse this with aggression, and they forbid it at schools. When my kids were going to school, for example—this was quite a while ago—they were forbidden to pick up snow on the off chance they might throw a snowball, and we know how terrible that is. I told my son he was perfectly welcome to pelt any teacher he wanted to in the back of the head with a snowball as long as he was willing to suffer the consequences of doing it. I don't know if he ever did, but he was certainly happy with the idea, which made me very happy about him.

Kids need to do this. They really, really, seriously need to do this. It's what civilizes them. That needs to happen between the ages of two and four, because



civilizes them. That needs to happen between the ages of two and four, because if they're not civilized by the time they're four, you might as well forget it. That's a horrible statistic, but it's unbelievably well-borne out in the relevant developmental literature. There's lots of aggressive two-year-olds. Most of them are male. If they stay aggressive past the age of four, they tend to be lifetime aggressive. They make no friends. They're outcasts, and they're much more likely to end up antisocial, criminal, delinquent, and in jail. Your kids need to be socialized between the ages of two and four, and that's particularly true for the more aggressive males. Most of aggressive two-year-olds are male—and that isn't socialization, by the way. There's a more abstract representation of the same sort of thing.

I'm trying to make the case that the hierarchy of authority emerges out of an underlying game-like matrix. That's one of the things that's so brilliant about Jean Piaget. He figured that out. It's so smart. He was interested in the biological origin of morality. He identified, traced the emergence of morality out of play. I just can't believe how smart an idea that was. Piaget was a constructionist, and to some degree a social constructionist. He underestimated the role of biology, but that doesn't invalidate his theory. It's really easy to put a biological underpinning underneath Piaget's theory. We know the biology well enough to do that quite nicely. Jaak Panksepp identifying the play circuit, for example, is a really good start with that. Play has been around so long that we have a circuit that's dedicated to it. That's a very, very ancient issue. This is very much an abstraction of a game, here. Then, of course, you get the ultimate abstraction, and representation, like that, where even the landscape of the game is fictional. Of course, we've migrated, to a large degree, into those sorts of fictional landscapes: fictional books, movies, video games. It's an extension of the same thing: practice for real life that shades, in some cases, into real life itself. More representations of God the Father. I like these representations. I like the triangle idea. I mean, I don't know why God is wearing a triangular hat. It's kind of a strange fashion choice, but I think it's associated with the idea of the pyramid, and I think that's associated with the idea of the hierarchy of authority. I think that's why the Egyptians put their pharaohs inside pyramids. I know there's more to it than that, but I think some of that has to do with the notion of this hierarchal structure. That's speculative, obviously, and I don't want to make too much out of it, but I can't help but think that there's something to that.

That's on the back of the American dollar bill. I like that a lot. That's like the eye of Horus, from the Egyptians. The idea is something like, at the top of the hierarchy is something that is no longer part of the hierarchy, right? If you move

up the hierarchy enough, what happens is that you develop the ability—as a consequence of moving up that hierarchy—to be detached enough from the hierarchy so you're no longer really part of it. You can move in all sorts of hierarchies. The thing you're really developing is the capacity to pay attention. From a mythological perspective, the one thing that seems to compete with the idea of the spoken word as the source of the extraction of habitable order from chaos is the eye and the capacity to pay attention.

Marduk, for example, the Mesopotamian creator God who emerged in the hierarchy of Mesopotamian Gods and came out at the top, had eyes all the way around his head. He could speak magic words. I really like that idea. The Egyptians developed that idea, too, because their God, Horus, was the eye. Everyone knows the eye of Horus. That image is so compelling that we still know about it. Everybody has seen the eye of Horus with the really open pupil. What the Egyptians learned was that the opened eye was what revived the dead society. It's so smart. What do you do if your life isn't in order? Bloody well pay attention. That isn't the same as thinking. It's a different process. Thinking is like the imposition of structure, in some sense. I know I'm oversimplifying, but paying attention is something like watching for what you don't know.

One of the things I often recommend to my clinical clients, if they're having trouble with a family member, is to, number one, stop telling them anything about yourself. I don't mean in a rude way, it's just no more personal information. Number two, watch them like a hawk and listen. If you do that long enough, they will tell you exactly what they're up to. They will also tell you who they think you are, and then you'll be shocked, because they think you're something, generally speaking, that's not like what you are at all. When they tell you, it's like a revelation to both of you. Attention is an unbelievably powerful force. You see this in psychotherapy, too, because a lot of what you do—and in any reparative relationship—is really pay attention to the other person. Pay attention and listen. You would not believe what people will tell you or reveal to you if you watch them as if you want to know, instead of watching them so that you'll have your prejudices reinforced. That's usually how people interact: I want to keep thinking about you the way I'm thinking about you, so I'm going to filter out anything that disproves my theory. That's not what I'm talking about at all. It's like, I'm going to watch you and figure out what you're up to. Not in a rude way, none of that. I just want to see what's there. That will be good for you, probably, and also be good for me.

The idea is that climbing up a hierarchy of authority can give you vision, and that vision can transcend the actual hierarchy. I think that's the metaphysical space that an artist occupies. Artists really aren't in a hierarchy. They're outside hierarchies. You've watched *The Lion King*, most of you? That's the little bird, Zazu. That's the eye of the king. That's echoed in this idea, as well. That's some more ideas of hierarchies. Same idea. Gold, silver, bronze. Why gold? Gold is the sun, and gold is pure. The idea is that the thing that's at the top of the hierarchy is incorruptible, because gold doesn't mix with anything else. It's this metal that doesn't ever become corrupted. It's a noble metal. It doesn't become corrupted. It shines like the sun, and it's associated with whatever's at the top of the hierarchy. The gold medal is a disc, like the sun, and it's awarded to those people who've occupied the top position, and who are manifestations of the ideal.

I'll tell you a quick story. Imagine you're watching an Olympic contest. The gymnasts are so absolutely unbelievable. You watch a gymnastics performance, and the person's out there bouncing around... You can't even imagine doing it. They're so perfect at it. So, you see this person, they're going through this routine, they're just absolutely spectacular and flawless at it, and at the end they stop and everybody claps. They're all excited to see what a human being can do. That's why we're in the audience watching, because we want to see what a human being can do. The judges go, like, 9.8, 9.8, 9.8, and everybody's thrilled. Then the next contestant comes out and it's like, well, they're just basically screwed. The person that came out before was perfect. How are you going to top that? That's an interesting question, because this is a representation of what you do to top perfection itself. You can do it, and here's how you do it—and you know this, even though you don't know you know it.

The next contestant is kind of shaky, because the bar has been raised high. What they do is they put themselves right on the edge of chaos. You can tell by watching them that they are one, bloody fraction of a second from catastrophe. They're pushing themselves farther than they've ever gone in the direction of their perfection. Everyone in the room is so tense they can hardly stand it. You can hear a pin drop. That person is flipping around, and they're right on the edge of catastrophe, and they finish with their chest puffed out and their arms raised in a gesture of triumph. Everybody rises in one instant and just claps like mad. It's like, why? What are you doing? What are you doing when you're doing that? You can't even help it; it grabs you right in the core of your being, and you stand up. It's an act of worship. You saw someone go beyond their perfection, into the

domain of chaos, and establish order right in front of your eyes. You're so thrilled about that. You're happy to be alive, and everyone's celebrating all at the same time. It's an absolutely amazing thing. Well, sometimes, that's what this represents. That's what we're trying to get at, because that's at the pinnacle of the hierarchy—not only are you doing what you should be doing, but you're doing it in a way that increases the probability that you'll do it better the next time you do it.

Here's another thing to think about, along the same lines—and I know we haven't got to Adam and Eve yet. You tell your kids to play fair. You say, it's not whether or not you win, it's how you play the game. You say that, and you don't really know what you mean. You feel kind of stupid saying it—even though you know it's true—and your kids look at you like there's something wrong with you. They don't know what you're talking about, either, but you know it's true. Here's why it's true: Life isn't a game. It's a set of games. The rule is to never sacrifice victory across the set of games for victory in one game, right? That's what it means to play properly. You want to play so that people keep inviting you to play. That's how you win. You win by being invited to play the largest possible array of games. The way you do that is by manifesting the fact that you can play in a reciprocal manner every time you play, even if there's victory at stake. That's what makes you successful across time.

We all know that, and we even tell our kids that, but we don't know that we know it. We're not adapting ourselves to the game, and to victory in the game. We're adapting ourselves to the meta-game, and to victory across the set of all possible games. That's exactly what—as far as I can tell—this is aiming at. It's the idea that there's a mode of being that transcends the particularities of the localized contest. That's the other way to think about it: to act morally is not to win today's contest at the expense of the rest of possible contests. Again, I don't see that as something that's arbitrary. It's not relativistic. There's an absolute, moral stance there, and everyone recognizes it. I also think it's the key to success. I would also say that the person who is the master at being invited to play the largest possible number of games—I haven't quite figured out the precise relationship between these two—is also the same person that goes out forthrightly to conquer the unknown before it presents itself as the enemy at the door. They're the same thing. I haven't figured out why that is, exactly, but I'll figure it out eventually. When I do, I'll tell you, if you're interested. Here's some other ideas of God as hierarchical authority figure. Strip the religious preconceptions off what you observe. Just look at what you see. There's primate looking upward at dominant figure. That's what you see. there. It's very

... interestingly, symbolically represented. You have God the Father with the cross, and I think what that means is there's a recognition, in the image, that the person who has the most authority is the one who voluntarily accepts the suffering that's part of being. That's what that picture represents. The authority holds that, and says, this is what you have to accept. That transfixes the viewer, because of the fact that it's true.

Well, is that true? Think about it this way: do you like brave people, or do you like cowards? That's pretty straightforward. What is the ultimate act of bravery? It's to come to terms with the fact that you're mortal and limited, and to live forthrightly regardless. That's at the core of what's admirable. Why would we presume that's not the case? We act as if that's the case. It's what everyone dreams and wishes they could do—assuming that you've dispensed with the idea that you're going to be immortal. I suppose that might be wishing for, too, or perhaps not. Immortal is a very long time. But you certainly want this, and that image says, well, this is what you should be.

We've got that same opening into the sky going on in that image that I showed you before. This is a transcendent truth. It constantly remanifests itself across time and space. Jung would say that image is built into your psyche. There are elements of it that are culturally constructed. It wouldn't necessarily have to be the cross, although the cross is a very old symbol. It's far older than its use in Christianity, and it's been used in many, many religious representations. The soul echoes with that. There's Moses, up there on the mount, receiving the law. We'll talk a lot more about that when we get to Exodus—if. Hah. Yea, yea. If we get to Exodus. Where does it happen? Well, on a mountain. That's a pyramid, right? It's up in the stratosphere, in the sky where you look upward. What's happening to Moses? I figured this out, partly, by reading Jean Piaget.

One of the things that Piaget says about kids is that they first learn to play a game, but they don't know what the rules are. Meaning that, if you have a bunch of kids together, they can play a game. But if you take one of the kids out of the game when they're young, say six, and say, what are the rules? They can only sort of give you a representation. So you take six-year-old one, and he'll tell you some of the rules, and six-year-old two will tell you different rules, and six-year-old three will tell you different rules. But, if you put them all together, they can play. They have the knowledge embodied, either individually or in the group. The knowledge is there to be extracted. Then they get a little older, and they can extract the rule. Then they start to play by the rules. Piaget's last step was that

it's not just that the kids play by the rules: they learn that they can make the rules. He thought about that as moral progression. First, you can play. Then you can play by the rules. Then you learn, maybe—because he didn't think everyone learned this—that you're actually the master of the rules. That doesn't mean the rules are arbitrary, but it means that you can be the generator of the rules, assuming that you know how to play the game. He thought about that as a moral progression.

I thought, well, that's exactly what happened to Moses in the story of Exodus. Moses is out there leading all those Israelites around. They don't have a law, and they don't have a law-giver. They have a tradition. They're all crabby because they're in a desert. They were in a tyranny, but now they're in a desert. That's no improvement. So they're really getting pretty bitchy about it. They're worshipping false idols, having one catastrophe after another, and they get Moses to judge their conflicts. He does that for God only knows how long—forever. Crabby Israelites come to Moses and bitch at him. He did this, and she did that. He has to figure out how to make peace. He does that for so long that one of his relatives—I think it's his father-in-law—tells him he has to stop doing it, because he's going to exhaust himself. You think, what's happening?

I'm not assuming that this is a literal, historical story. I think, again, it's a condensation. Any group has a set of customs, just like a wolf pack does. The customs are being manifest, and someone who's a genius is watching, and thinking, ok, what's the rule in this situation? What's the rule in this situation? What's the rule in this situation? And then, in his imagination the rules turn into a hierarchy. He goes up on the mountain and it goes, bang! And he thinks, oh my God! Here's the rules that we've been living by all this time! That's the revelation of the commandments. How else could it be? The rules came first and obeying them came second? No. The actions come first, and then you figure out what everybody's up to. You say, hey, look, this is what you've been up to all along, and everybody goes, oh, yeah, that seems to make sense. If it didn't, who would follow them? No one is going to follow them if they don't match what's already there. You just think about that as unjust.

That's portrayed, here, as a cataclysmic human event. It's like, oh my God, we've been chimpanzees, and we've been in this hierarchy of authority for so long that we have no idea what we're doing. All of a sudden, poof! It burst into revelatory consciousness. We could say, here is the law. You say, well, is it given by God? Hey, it depends on what you mean by "God." You could start with that presupposition, but it's not like it just came out of nowhere. And this is

something else Nietzsche observed. He said that a moral revelation was the consequence of a tremendously long process of initial construction and then formulation. Thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of years of building custom before you get the revelation of the articulated law, which is a description of the pattern that works. Well, what's the pattern that works? It's the game that you can play with everybody else, day after day, with no degeneration.

Another thing Piaget figured out that's so brilliant is his idea of the equilibrated state. It's an extension of Immanuel Kant's idea about a universal maxim. Act in a way so that each action could become a universal rule: that was Kant's fundamental, moral maxim. Piaget put a twist on that. He said, no, no. That's not exactly it. Act in such a way that works for you now, and next week, and next month, and next year, and ten years from now, so that, while it's working for you, it's also working for the people around you, and for the broader society. That's the equilibrated state. You could think about that as an intimation of the kingdom of the city of God on earth. It's based on this idea that a morality has to be iterable.

There's been lots of artificial intelligence simulations of trading games. The people who've been studying the emergence of moral behavior in artificial intelligence systems have already caught on to the idea that one of the crucial elements to the analysis of morality is iterability. You can't play a degenerating game, because it degenerates. You want to play a game that, at least, remains stable across time, and, God, if you could really get your act together, maybe it would slowly get better. Of course, that's what you hope for your family. That's what you're always trying to do, unless you're completely hell-bent on revenge and destruction. It's like, is there a way that we can continue to play together that will make playing together even better the next day? That's what you're up to. I don't see anything arbitrary about that.

This is also why I think the bloody postmodernists are so incorrect. They say there's an infinite number of interpretations of the world. That's actually true, but this is where they make a mistake: they say that no interpretation is to be privileged over any other interpretation. It's like, wrong. Wrong. That's where things go seriously off the rails. The interpretation has to be—and this is the Piagetian objective—if you and I are going to play a game, rule one is we both have to want to play. Rule two is other people are going to let us play. Rule three is we should be able to play across a pretty long period of time without it

degenerating. Maybe rule four is, while we're playing, the world shouldn't kill us. There are not many games—you don't send your kids out to play on the superhighway, right? They're not playing hockey on the superhighway, because the world kills them. There's an infinite number of interpretations, but there is not an infinite number of solutions. The solutions are constrained by the fact of the world and our suffering in the world, and also constrained by the fact that we constrain each other. That's where I think that's gone dreadfully, dreadfully wrong.

It's really fun to look at these old pictures once you know what they mean. What I've discovered is that, once that I understand the underlying rational—I mean, that's an engraving. Someone worked hard on that. They took a long time making that picture. They were serious about it. When you understand what it means...All those people are prostrated at the revelation of the law. It's like, well, no wonder. Break the law and see what happens. Break the universal moral law, and see what happens. I see people in that situation—well, as you all do, all the time. Perhaps me more than you because I'm a clinical psychologist. If the people I'm seeing haven't broken the universal law, then you can bloody well be sure that people around them have. It's no joke. Things will go seriously wrong for you if you make a mistake.

It's no wonder that you'd be terrified at the revelation of the structure that governs our being. One of the things that's so remarkable about the Old Testament—this is another thing that Nietzsche commented on. He was a real admirer of the Old Testament, but not so much of the New Testament. He thought it was a sin for Europe to have glued the New Testament onto the Old Testament. He thought the Old Testament was a really accurate representation of the phenomenology of being. Stay awake, speak properly, and be honest, or watch the hell out, because things will come your way that you just do not want to see, at all. It might not just be you: it might be everyone you know and everything about your culture that is demolished for generation after generation.

Stay awake and be careful. I think that people only don't believe that when they're being hubristic. I think that most people know that deep in their hearts. When you get high on your horse—that happens fairly often—if you have any sense, you think, geez, I better be careful and tap myself down a fair bit. If I get too puffed up, something's going to come along and take me out at the knees. Everyone knows that pride comes before a fall. That's why it says in the Old Testament that fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. I've never, in all my years as a clinical psychologist—and this is something that really does terrify me



—seen anyone, ever, get away with anything at all, even once.

There's that old idea that God has a book and keeps track of everything in heaven. Maybe it's not a book, but that is a really useful thing to think about. Maybe you disagree, and you think people get away with things all the time. I tell you, I've never seen it. What I see instead is that someone twists the fabric of reality. They do it successfully, because it doesn't snap back at them at that moment. And then, like two years later, something unravels and they get walloped. They think, oh my God! That's so unfair! And then we track it. It's like, what happened before that? This. Then what? This. And then what? This. And then what? Oh! That's where it went wrong.

You can't twist the fabric of reality without having it snap back. It doesn't work that way, and why would it? What are you going to do, twist the fabric of reality? I don't think so. I think it's bigger than you, and I think that one of the things that really tempts people is the idea that you can get away with it. It's like, yea, you try. You see how well that works. You get away with nothing, and that is the beginning of wisdom. It's something that deeply terrifies me. Ever since last September, when I came to more broader public attention, one of the things I've been terrified of is making a mistake. I certainly know I'm more than capable of making a mistake. Thank God that, so far, I haven't made one, or no one's found out about it. But we walk on a very thin and narrow edge, and we're very lucky when things aren't degenerating into chaos around us, or rapidly moving to far too much order. It's not an easy thing to stay on that line. You can tell when you're on that line because things are deeply meaningful and engaging. But if you're not existentially terrified of the consequences of wavering off that, then you are truly not awake. That's what I see in this picture. It's like, look out, because there are rules. If you break them, God help you.

It seems to be the case that one of the advantages of gluing the New Testament to the Old Testament is the idea of a transformation in morality. It's analogous to the Piagetian idea that, after you learn to play by the rules, you can learn to make the rules. I think that's actually what happens, to some degree, to the transition between the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the Old Testament, most morality is prohibition: here are things you shouldn't do. Fair enough. That's a lot of what you do with your kids. Don't do this, don't do this, don't do this, especially when they're happy. You're always going around to tell them to stop being so happy, because all they're doing is causing trouble. It's quite painful if you're a parent and you notice that, but the first morality is prohibition.

Control yourself so that you don't cause too much trouble. And then, maybe, if you get that down and you're good at it, then you can start working towards something that's a positive good. That's the transformation that seems, to me, to be fundamentally characteristic of the juxtaposition of the New Testament onto the Old Testament. But, in these images, it's still something like, serve tradition, and serve the Father. Psychologically speaking, support the tradition, because you live on it.

In an old Mesopotamian story, the Enuma Elis, the original Gods are really badly behaved. In fact, they're a lot like two-year-olds. They kill the primordial God, Apsu, who's the patriarchal God. They kill him and try to live on his corpse. Well, that's what we all do, because we live on the corpse of our ancestors—you could say we live on the corpse of our culture. It's dead, and that's not a great place to live. You have to keep revivifying it so the damn thing stays active and awake. You stay on the corpse for too long and then the devil, a demon of chaos, comes back. That's what happens in the Mesopotamian story. It's like, don't be thinking that you can stay on the corpse of your ancestors for too long without contributing to the revivification of the system. The chaos that all of that holds at bay will definitely come and visit you.

You see that in stories like *The Hobbit*. Hobbits are nice. They like to eat. They're kind of fat and short. They're not very bright, and they're hubristic. They have no idea what's out there in the broader world. They're protected, if you remember, by the Striders, who are the sons of great kings, and who look like tramps. The hobbits have nothing but contempt for them. The Striders patrol the borders and keep the bloody hobbits safe, but out there, in the periphery, all hell is brewing. Chaos is generating and forming. That's an archetypal story, and that's why people like that story so much. It's exactly right. We're the hobbits, and we are protected from chaos by the spirits of our dead ancestors—and we're too damned stupid to know it. We think, oh, we don't need them anymore. To me, that's postmodernism. That's what the bloody universities are doing to the humanities. It's absolutely appalling, and we will pay for it unless we wake up. That would be better than paying for it, even though being awake is rather painful.

I had this vision, one time. I've kind of portrayed it in this image of what the world was like. I thought, well, it's not a pyramid. It's not a single hierarchy of authority: it's an array of hierarchies of authority. You imagine an infinite plane, and in the infinite plane there's nothing but pyramids. Inside the pyramids there are strata of people, everywhere, as far as you can look. Some of the pyramids

are swarms of people, everywhere, as far as you can look. Some of the pyramids are tall, and some of them are short; they overlap. The plane is endless, and those are all the positions to which you could rise. Everybody's inside the pyramids, sort of camped up, trying to move toward the top. And then there's the possibility of sailing across, overtop all of them, and seeing how the structure itself works. That's the eye that floats above the pyramid, and it sees the structure itself. The highest order of being is not to be at the top of the pyramid: it's to use the discipline you attain by striving towards the top of the pyramid to release yourself from the pyramid and move one step up. I think that's one of the things instantiated in the idea, for example, of the Holy Ghost. I think that's akin to Sisyphus. Nietzsche says of Sisyphus, if I remember correctly, that "one must imagine him happy." If there's a rock at the bottom of a hill, then you might as well push it up a hill. If it rolls back down, well, you've got something else to do, don't you? To push the damn rock back up the hill. There's no shortage of rocks to push up the hill, and that's what were built for, anyways. So let's go out and push some damn boulders up the hill, and maybe we can have enough self-confidence and respect for ourselves that we wouldn't have to turn to hatred and revenge, and try to take everything down. I think that's the alternative. He's not weak. That's one thing you could say about him. Same idea represented, there. That's Atlas, who voluntarily takes the world on his shoulders. It's like the idea of Christ taking the sins of the world on his shoulders. It's exactly the same notion, which is the notion that you should be able to recognize in yourself all the horror of humanity and take responsibility for it. That's what that means. The thing that's so interesting about that is that, if you can recognize in yourself all the horror of humanity, you will instantly have a hell of a lot more respect for yourself than you did before you did that. There's some real utility in knowing that you're a monster. Now, just because you're a monster doesn't mean you have to be a monster. But it's really useful to know that you are one.

One of the things that Jung knew—and this is something that I find so amazing about his writing, and, I think, something that really distinguishes him from Joseph Campbell, who talked about following your bliss—was that the first step to enlightenment is the encounter with the shadow. What he meant by that was that everything horrible that human beings have done was done by human beings, and you're one of them. To understand what that really means, to know how it was that you could have done it... That's a shattering thing to try to imagine—trying to imagine yourself as someone who's engaged in medieval torture, to see how you could, in fact, do that... You're never the same after you learn that.

Being never the same after learning that is unbelievably useful. When you understand that's what you're like, then you're a whole different creature. I don't think—and this is something I did learn from Jung—you can be a good person until you know how much evil you contain within you. It's not possible. It's partly because you just don't have any potency. If you're just naive, if you're just nice, if you never hurt anyone, not even a fly, and you don't have the capability for any of that, why would anyone, ever, take you seriously? You're just a domestic animal, at best, and a rather contemptible one, at that. It's a very strange thing, because you wouldn't think that the revelation of the capacity for evil is a precondition for the realization of good. First of all, why would you be serious enough to even attempt to pursue the good unless you had some sense of what the consequence was of not doing it? You have to be serious about these sorts of things. It's not the game of a child, right? It's the game of a fully developed adult. I learned this, in part, when I had little kids. I wrote a chapter for my new book called "Never Let Your Children Do Anything That Makes You Dislike Them." And why was that? I wrote that after I knew I was a monster. I thought, I'm going to make sure I like my kids. I'm going to make sure they behave around me, so that I like them. I'm way bigger than them, and I'm way more cruel than they are, and I've got tricks up my sleeve that they cannot even possibly imagine. If they irritate me, I will absolutely take it out on them. If you don't think that you're the sort of person that would do that, then you are the sort of person who is doing it.

We're not going to get to Adam and Eve. Hah. I watched this great documentary called [Hitman Hart](#). It was about [Bret Hart](#), who was the most famous Canadian in the world for a while. He was a World Wide Wrestling Federation wrestler. He was a good guy. He came from this famous family of wrestlers who all came from Alberta. I think there were 7 brothers, who were wrestlers, and 7 sisters. All the sisters married wrestlers. They were all children of Stu Hart, who was a wrestling [impresario](#) like 40 years ago. It was such a cool documentary, because I was always wondering, why in the world do people watch wrestling and believe it?

Believe it...Do you believe movies when you go watch them? That's a hard question to answer. While you're there, you do. If you're watching wrestling, and you're a wrestling fan, do you believe it? Well, it isn't a matter of belief. It's a matter of being engaged in a drama. There are different levels of drama. Let's say that World Wide Wrestling Federation drama is not the most sophisticated form of drama. But I'm not being a smart aleck when I'm saying that. There's

drama or different sophistication for different people. That's also why religious truths exists at multiple levels simultaneously. There's got to be something in it for everyone, and that's a hard belief system. That's a hard system to put together: something for the unbelievably sophisticated, and something for the common person.

Ok, so we have wrestling, and Bret Hart was a good guy. He fell into the archetype of being the good guy, and that's partly what the documentary is about. It was a bit too much for him. One of the things that he laid out so carefully was—he figured that 120 million knew him, something like that—that everywhere he went, he was treated like a hero. He found that quite a burden, as you can imagine if you think about it. But he portrayed what was happening in the wrestling ring as classic, good against evil. Not conceptualized and discussed, but embodied, fought out, acted out, like Thor and the Hulk, except right in front of you.

We could consider hockey more sophisticated than wrestling, perhaps, and, as I've said, I'm not being critically-minded about these things. I understand their purpose. Here's the same thing. It's a silver cup. There's the hero of the team—the hero of the teams. Here's something cool: If you're a fan of the Toronto Blue Jays, or the Toronto Maple Leafs...Of course, this hardly ever happens to you if you're a fan of the Toronto Maple Leafs, because they always lose...If you're watching a game and your team wins, and we take your testosterone levels, then they went up. If you watch the Toronto Maple Leafs and they lost, and you're a fan, then your testosterone levels go down. That's pretty damn funny. Don't you see how deeply instantiated this is in people? It bloody well alters your biochemistry. Your testosterone levels are all, oh, my team lost. It's like, there will be nothing in it for the wife tonight. This is the cosmos from the phenomenological perspective. One of the things that has come to my realization is that this is real. This is real. It's not a metaphor. It's way deeper than a metaphor. The most real things about life are the place you don't know and the place you know. You could say that's explored territory and unexplored territory, and it's been around forever, back to the lobsters. If you put lobsters in a new place, the first thing they do is go around their territory finding places to hide, and also making a burrow. The first thing they do is establish what they know against what they don't know. That's real. It's real from the Darwinian perspective, and we're going to say that what's real from the Darwinian perspective is plenty real enough.

That's what this Daoist symbol is. It says, what is experience made of, eternally?

That's easy: chaos and order. In every bit of chaos there's the possibility of order, and in every bit of order there's the possibility of chaos. That's the way. That's the path of life. That's life itself, and where you're supposed to be is on the border between the two of those. Why is that? Stable enough, engaged enough, right? Not only are you doing what you should be doing, you're doing it in a way that increased the probability that you'll do it better tomorrow. You can tell when you're doing that because you're engaged. You're in the right time and place. Your neurology tells you that. That's what transcendent meaning is.

I also think that is the antidote to existential suffering. The antidote to existential suffering is to be at the right place at the right time. If you want to get technical about it, the reality of existential suffering is reality and pain. Let's say you're in the right place at the right time. What happens to you biochemically?

[Dopaminergic](#) activation. What does that do? Suppresses anxiety, and it's [analgesic](#). It's more than that, because it also produces positive emotion and the desire to move forward. It underlies creativity. So not only do you get the positive engagement from a neurochemical perspective, you get the analgesia, and you get the reduction of anxiety. It's not hypothetical. It is the case that the dopaminergic systems—those are the exploratory systems, unbelievably ancient and archaic—are activated when you're optimally positioned to be incorporating new information, which is what human beings do. We're information foragers.

We want to be secure but building on our security at the same time. We want to do it for ourselves, for our families, for other people, and for broader society. We want to bring the whole world together in alignment to do that, and that's meaningful. God only knows what we could do about the suffering of the world if we did that. We have no idea what we could do if we started doing things properly. Maybe we could stop so many of the things that dismay us about life. We stopped a lot of them in the last 100 years. Things are a lot better than they were a hundred years ago. Obviously they're not perfect, but 100 years ago, 120 years ago...Man, the average person in the Western world lived on less than a dollar a day, in today's dollars. It's like, you just try that for a week and see how much fun that is.

This is the pre-cosmogonic chaos out of which the word of God extracted habitable order at the beginning of time. It's the same thing. We'll talk more about that later, I guess, because it's a very complicated thing to describe. The chaos is what you encounter when the twin towers fall. You remember what that was like, right? It was September 10th. That was the world. Everyone knew what the world was like. And then it was September 11th, and everyone walked

the world was like. And then it was September 11th, and everyone walked around dazed for three days because the buildings fell. But so what? You can see a building fall, and you can understand what happens when a building falls. So what's going on with being dazed? The chaos that underlies our habitable order manifested itself when those buildings collapsed. It was a brilliant act of terrorism. Everyone was frozen and curious, because that's how we react to that sort of thing. Remember that famous movie poster for Jaws, with the woman swimming on top of the water and that terrible leviathan shark coming up to take her out? That's life. That's the world, and now and then you see that. When something falls like the twin towers fall, you remember the ocean below you, the primordial abyss. That bloody thing is deep, and you're fragile. That happens when someone betrays you, and it happens to you when your dreams fall apart. You encounter that chaos, again, from which the world is extracted. Then you're called upon to act out attention and the word in order to bring the world back into order.

None of that is superstitious. None of that is even metaphorical. It's real. It's more real than anything else, and I think the reason for that, in part, is that it's been this way forever. This has been the rule of life for as long as there's been life. That's the cosmos and reality. That's what we inhabit. The so-called new atheists—and I don't want to go on a tangent about new atheists, because I think atheists are often remarkably honest and very consistent in their analysis, but I just don't think they're taking the problem seriously. I don't think they take their evolutionary theorizing nearly with the seriousness that it necessitates. I don't think that you can dispute the proposition that, the longer something has had a selection effect on life, the more real it is. That's the fundamental axiom of Darwinian biology. I think the Darwinian world is more real than the physical world. That was the argument that I was trying to have with Sam Harris. I didn't do the world's best job of that, but it went not too bad the second time. It's not something to be taken lightly. It's a very serious, profound, and meaningful proposition. People act it out and want to act it out, whether they know it or not.

That's Marduk. The story of Marduk...I'll just give it to you very briefly. Tiamat and Apsu are locked in embrace in the beginning of time. The Goddess of salt water and the God of fresh water, together. Chaos and order. They give rise to masculine and feminine. They give rise to the world of the elder Gods. Those, to me, are primordial motivational forces, something like that. They're rage, lust, love, and all these things that possess us and are there forever. They're out in the world, acting, and they carelessly slay Apsu, their father. They're

making a racket and then they kill Apsu. Tiamat gets wind of that—that's Tiamat, right there, by the way. She's kind of a rough-looking creature. She's the mother of all things, and so she's not very happy about this. Her children have destroyed structure itself, plus they're noisy and careless. She thinks, all right—just like Noah, just like the God that brings the flood to Noah. Exactly the same idea. Tiamat comes back and says, yea, ok. Enough is enough. I'm going to take you out. She makes this battalion of monsters and puts the worst monster there is at the head of the battalion. His name is [Kingu](#), and he's like a precursor to the idea of Satan. She lets the Gods know, hey, I'm coming for you.

The Gods are not very happy about this. They're Gods, but she's chaos itself. She gave birth to everything. This is no joke. They send one God out after another to confront her. They all come back with their tails between their legs. There's no hope. And then, one day, a new God that emerges. That's Marduk. The Gods know, as soon as he pops up, that he's something new. Remember that this is something happening while the Mesopotamians are assembling themselves into one of the world's first, great civilizations. All the Gods of all those tribes are coming together to organize themselves into a hierarchy to figure out what proposition rules everything. Marduk is elected by all the Gods, and he says, look, I'll go out there and I'll take on Tiamat, but here's the rule: From here on, you follow me. I determine destiny. I'm the top God. I'm the thing at the top of the hierarchy. All the other Gods say, no problem. If you get rid of chaos, we will do exactly what you say.

Marduk has eyes all the way around his head and he speaks magic words. Those are his primary attributes. He takes a net and he goes out to confront Tiamat. He encloses her in a net, which I think is so cool because it's an encapsulation. It's a conceptual encapsulation. He encloses chaos itself in a conceptual structure. He puts her in a net, cuts her into pieces, and then he makes the world. He creates human beings, who inhabit that world and serve the Gods. He creates human beings out of the blood of Kingu, the worst of the demons.

Colin Young, who's a student of mine, helped me figure that out. I thought that's pretty damn pessimistic. It's like a fall metaphor, the idea of original sin. But our joint conclusion with regards to that was that human beings are the only creatures in creation that can truly deceive. We have the capacity for evil, just like it says in the Adam and Eve story. We can actually do that. That's why we're made out of the blood of Kingu, king of the demons. We are the thing that can deceive and twist the structure of reality.



The Mesopotamians had an emperor, and the emperor was the avatar of Marduk. That's what made him emperor: he was only an emperor if he was going to be Marduk. He had to be a good Marduk, which meant he had to confront Tiamat, cut her up, and make order out of her pieces. The Mesopotamians used to go outside their walled city at the new year's celebration—that's explored territory versus unexplored territory—and they'd bring all the statues that represented the God. They'd act this out, because they're trying to figure out what this means. Then the priest would make their emperor kneel, and they'd take his emperor uniform off and humiliate him, and nail him with a glove, and say, ok, how were you not a good Marduk this year? He'd recount all the ways that he was inadequate in confronting chaos, and then they'd do the celebrating. Marduk would win, and the king would go sleep with a royal prostitute. It's the same idea as Saint George pulling the virgin from the dragon. It's exactly the same idea. If you encounter the reptilian chaos, you can extract something out of it with which, if you unite, you produce creative order. That's what they were acting out. That was the basis for the Mesopotamian idea of sovereignty. It's so smart. It's so unbelievably smart.

The Mesopotamians had a massive influence on future civilizations, that then had a massive influence on us. It's one of the stories of how the notion of sovereignty itself came to be. It's the evolution of the idea of God. That's one way of thinking about it, but even more importantly, it's the evolution of the idea of the redemptive human being. That's taken to one of its conclusions in the story of Buddha, but also in the story of Christ—the idea of the perfect individual. That's the word that speaks truth into chaos at the beginning of time to generate habitable order. That's the story. So with that...

I'll just show you these pictures. They're so interesting. That's the symbol of infinity. That's Hercules and the hydra. What's life like? Cut off one head, what happens? Seven more grow, right? What do you do, run home? No. That's not what you do. You fight it. It's the ultimate chaos that generates partial chaos, but that chaos is also what revivifies life, because otherwise it would just be static. Mercury and the head of the hydra, right? It freezes you. That's Saint George. He's killing it peacefully, which is so interesting. He's got a beatific look on his face—that's a particular representation. Another Saint George, with the virgin in the background. I think that's [Saint Anne](#), if I remember correctly. Saint George is the patron saint of England. This actually sheds light on the human proclivity for warfare. That's a Muslim soldier. It's really easy to transform the enemy into the dragon, because the enemy is often predatory. We do that instantaneously,

without a second thought. Then we can go to war morally, because why not take out the snakes? Well, the problem is, where are the snakes? Maybe they're outside, and maybe they're not. Maybe they're in this room. Even worse, maybe they're in you. That's wisdom, when you know that they're in you. Why wouldn't the virgin be happy about that? Especially if she had a child, right? Seriously. That's Horus, the God of vision. He was a falcon, because falcons have great vision. They fly above everything and they can see everything. That was the Egyptian creator God, Horus. I'll tell you a story about Horus at some point, as well. Here's some pictures that demonstrate what I had described as the emergence of the meta-hero out of the hero. There's the person you admire, and then there's the set of people that you admire, and then there's the meta-set of admirable people and the extraction of that ideal. As far as I can tell, that's what's portrayed in these images. That's a great one. It's a very sophisticated image. The two sides of Christ's face are not symmetrical. One's God, and one's man, that's what that icon means: the fully developed person. It's one of the oldest representations of this sort that we know. The idea is that there's the human person in his ordinariness, let's say, and then there's this kinship with the divine, which is associated with the willing adoption of the responsibility of mortal being. That produces this union, and then it's manifest in a book. That's speech, and it's associated with the Son. It's the proper way of being. That's a perfect example, I think, of the emergence of the archetype out of the multitude. That's what it looks like to me. I guess we're done with Genesis 1. That took three lectures, but God's complicated. Thank you. Next week, by all appearances, that's where we are. We've got 20 minutes for questions.

## **IV: Adam and Eve: Self-Consciousness, Evil, and Death**

Hello everyone. Hopefully we're going to get past Genesis 1 today. That's the theory. I finished my new book yesterday. That's taken about three years of writing—quite a long time to write something. So, yea, it's done...Except for the moping up, copy editing, and that sort of thing. I don't know if it's any good, but it's as good as I can make it.

I've been thinking about the stories that I'm going to tell you tonight for a very long period of time—like the ones last week, for that matter, but these even longer. One of the things that I just cannot understand is how there can be so much information in such tiny little stories, especially the story of Cain and Abel. That story...Every time I read it, it just flattens me, because it's only like a paragraph long. There's just nothing to it. Every time I think about it, another layer comes out from underneath it, and I can't figure that out. The rational approach that I've been describing to you is predicated on the idea that these stories have somehow encapsulated wisdom that we generated interpersonally and behaviourally, and then in image, over very vast stretches of time, and then condensed into very, very dense, articulated words that are then further refined by the act of being remembered and transmitted over vast stretches of time. That's a pretty good argument. I'm willing to go with it, but it still never ceases to amaze me how much information such tiny little passages can contain.

We'll take that apart today. I think it's especially true of the story of Cain and Abel because it works on the individual level, and the familial level, and the political level, and the level of warfare, and it works at the level of economics. That's a lot for a tiny, one-paragraph story to cover. You could object: well, with these stories, you never know what you're reading into it, and what's in the story. That's part of—let's call it the postmodern dilemma, and fair enough. There's really no answer to that anymore than there is an answer to, how do you know your interpretation of the world is—well, let's not say correct, but sufficient. There's some answer to that: it's sufficient if you can act it out in the world and other people don't object too much, and you don't die, and nature doesn't take a bite out of you any more often than necessary. Those are the constraints in which we live, so you have some way of determining whether your interpretation is, at least, functionally successful, and that's not trivial. I guess you could say the same thing to the interpretations that might be laid on these stories. At the moment, that's probably good enough.

Hopefully you find the interpretations functionally significant at multiple levels. I also think the chance of managing that by chance is very, very small. To be able to pull off an interpretation of a story that works at multiple levels simultaneously...With each level, the chances that you've stumbled across something by chance have to be decreasing. There's a technical term for that in psychology. It's called something like [Multitrait-Multimethod Matrix](#), of determining whether or not something is accurate. The idea is, the more ways that you can measure it and get the same result, the more confident you can be that you're not just deluding yourself with your a priori hypothesis. There's actually something out there. It's also a method that I use in my speaking. I don't try to tell people anything that isn't personally relevant, because you should know why you are being taught something—you should know what the fact is good for, and then it should be good for you personally, at least in some sense. If you act it out in the world, it should be good for your family, and maybe it should have some significance for the broader community. I think that's what meaning means. I don't really see the utility in being taught facts that aren't meaningful, because there's an infinite number of facts, and there's no way you're going to remember all of them. They have to have the aspect of tools, because we are tool-using creatures. These stories have that aspect. As far as I can tell, there's no doubt about that.

The stories in Genesis 2 are very famous, obviously. Virtually everybody who's even vaguely versed in, roughly speaking, Western culture, knows these stories. That's something that's interesting, too: stories can be so foundational that everybody shares them. You can say the same thing about a fairly large handful of fairy tales, as well—or you could, at least, until recently. But the fact that stories are foundational, I think, also means that they have to be given a kind of—well, even if you don't give them any respect, you have to, at least, treat them as remarkable curiosities. So why those stories? Why did they stick around? Why does everybody know them? It's not self-evident by any stretch of the imagination. You can use the Freudian explanation.

Freud sort of thought that the Judeo-Christian was predicated on the idea that the figure of the father—the familial father—was expanded up into cosmic dimensions, so that mankind existed in the same kind of relationship to the cosmic Father that an infant or a small child existed in relationship to his or her own father. That's a reasonable critique, I would say, but it does—and this was purposeful—it does imply—more than imply, in Freud's case—that people who adopt a religious belief that has a personified figure at its apex are essentially

acting out the role of dependent children. I thought about that critique for a long time. Believe me, that's been a powerful critique.

One of the best books I ever read, called [The Denial of Death](#) by [Ernest Becker](#), took that line of argumentation and developed it as well as any book I've ever seen argue it. Becker tried to bring closure to Freudian psychoanalysis on religion. He did a pretty wicked job of it. I think the book is seriously flawed and wrong, but it's really a great book. Some books are wrong in really good ways. They make a powerful, powerful argument, and they really take it to its extreme. I think Becker missed the point, and he missed it in the same way that Freud missed Jung's point. Becker, who wrote this book on the psychoanalysis of religion, never referred to Jung, except very briefly in the introduction, and I think that was a major mistake.

Becker took the argument that the hypothesis of God is nothing but an attempt by human beings to recreate a quasi-infantile state of dependency, to be able to rely on an all-knowing Father, and to thereby recover the comfort, perhaps, that we experienced when we were young and had a, hypothetically, all-knowing father—for those of us who are lucky to have someone who vaguely resembled that. The more I thought about that, the more that struck me as quite impossible across time. [Charles Taylor](#) wrote an interesting book called [Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity](#). He's a McGill philosopher, and I wouldn't necessarily call him a friend of classic religion, but it doesn't matter: he made a very interesting point about Christianity, in particular. He said that if you're going to invent a religion that offered you nothing but infantile comfort, why in the world would you bother with conceptualizing hell? That just seems like an unnecessary detail to add to the whole story, right? If it's all about comfort, why would you hypothesize that the consequence of serious error was eternal torment? That isn't the sort of thing that is likely to make you feel comfortable.

James Joyce, when he wrote about that, said he had terrible nightmares when he was a child because of the hellfire sermons that Jesuits used to spew forth. He wrote down what he remembered of them. They were pretty hair-raising. I think it was in [A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man](#) that he talked about the Jesuits telling him that hell was like a prison with walls that were seven miles thick, that was always in darkness and consumed by fire, and that the people who were trapped there were continually burnt by this dark fire that gave new light, which also, simultaneously, rejuvenated their flesh so that it could be burnt off eternally—in case you were wondering how it was going to be burnt off eternally. That's

apparently the process. It's not easy for me to see that as an infantile wish fulfilment, I'm afraid. You could be a cynic about it. [Elaine Pagels](#), who wrote a book on the devil, was cynical about it in this manner. She thought that the Christians, so to speak, invented hell as a place to put their enemies, and fair enough. But that's not accurate, although it's convenient to have a place to put your enemies. Charles Taylor did point out, for example, that the modern terror of loss of self, let's say—the existential loss of self and meaning—was, perhaps, paralleled by the medieval terror of hell in terms of existential intensity. Hell wasn't merely a place where those people that you didn't care for would end up: it was the place where you were going to go if you didn't walk the line properly.

I don't think Freud's critique really holds water in the final analysis. Marx's critique, of course, was that religion was the opiate of the masses. He made an argument that was similar to Freud's, although somewhat earlier, and made it based on the presupposition that religious beliefs were stories told to the gullible masses in order to keep them pacified and happy while their corporate overlords, for lack of a better purpose, continue to exploit and weaken them. I find the critique of human institutions as driven entirely by power very questionable, to say the least. Of course, every human institution is corrupt for one reason or another, and it's also corrupt, specifically, by such things as deception, arrogance, and the demand for unearned power. The same thing can be applied to religious systems, but that doesn't mean that they are in some special way characteristic of those faults. Maybe you think they are, and maybe you can make a case for it, but it's not [prime facie](#) evident that it is a particularly useful criticism.

I don't buy it. I think that's far too cynical. I think the people who wrote these stories—first of all, what are you going to do? Are you going to run a bloody conspiracy for 3,000 years successfully? Good luck with that. You can't run a conspiracy for 15 minutes without someone ratting you out. It's impossible. Whatever's at the basis of the construction—not only of these stories, but of the dogmatic structures that emerged from them...I think that it's a terrible mistake to reduce them to unidimensional explanations. I generally think that reducing any complex human behavior to a unidimensional explanation is often a sign of a seriously limited thinker. I say that with some caution, because Freud did do that with religion, to some degree, and Freud was a serious thinker. Marx, I suppose, was a serious thinker, too, even though...well...He's someone that...If you have any sense, Marx just leaves you speechless.

So, anyway, that's all to say that I don't think there's any simple explanation for

So, anyways, that's all to say that I don't think there's any simple explanation for how these stories have the power that they have. I really don't think you can reduce it to political conspiracy, and that's for sure. I don't think you can reduce it to psychological infantilism. I think you can make a case, like I have, that they are repositories of the collective wisdom of the human race.

I had an interesting letter this week from someone—I get a lot of interesting letters. I think I'm going to make an archive out of them and put them on the web at some point—with people's permission, obviously. He said that he'd been following my lectures, and noted that I'd been making what you might describe as a quasi-biological, or evolutionary, case for the emergence of the information that the stories contain. He said, well, how do you know that someone from a different religion, or speaking of a different religious tradition, couldn't do exactly the same thing? I thought, well, first of all, to some degree they could, because theirs overlapped. I've talked to you a little about Daoism, for example, and the Daoist view of being as the eternal balance between chaos and order. I don't know if you know this, but there's a neuropsychologist called [Elkhonon Goldberg](#), who's a student of [Alexander Luria](#). Luria was, I think, the greatest neuropsychologist of the 20th century. He was a Russian, and he was one of the first people to really determine, in large part, the function of the frontal cortex, which was quite a mystery for a long period of time. Goldberg—you know how we have two hemispheres? We have the left hemisphere and the right hemisphere, and people often think of the left for right-handed people—right-handed males more particularly, because women are more neurologically diffuse. It's one of the things that makes them more robust to head injury, for example. Maybe men are less diffuse and somewhat more specialized, which makes them a bit more specialized but a little more subject to damage.

Anyways, we have two hemispheres: the left, and the right, and no one exactly knows why. We know that they house quasi-independent consciousnesses, because if you divide the [corpus callosum](#) that unites them—which was done in cases of intractable epilepsy, for example—each hemisphere is capable of developing its own consciousness, to some degree—the right generally nonverbal, and the left verbal. So there has been this idea that the left is a verbal hemisphere, and the right is a nonverbal hemisphere, but that can't be right because animals don't talk, and they have a bifurcated hemisphere. So, if it's right, it's not causally right.

Goldberg hypothesizes, instead, that the hemispheres were specialized for routinization and non-routinization, or for novelty and familiarity, or for chaos



and order. So that's pretty damn cool. When I ran across that, I also thought of that as a signal of...What would you call it...[Multitrait-Multimethod](#) construct validation. I'd never thought of the hemispheres as operating that way, and Goldberg came up with this in a historical pathway that was entirely independent from any mythologically inspired thinking—completely independent. In fact, it was motivated more by materialist, Russian neuropsychology, which was materialist for political reasons, and also for scientific reasons. But the idea is that we have one hemisphere that reacts very rapidly to things we don't know. It's more imaginative and diffuse, and it's associated more with negative emotion, because negative emotion is what you should feel, immediately, when you encounter something you don't understand. Negative emotion is a form of thinking. It's like, I'm somewhere where things aren't what they should be. The right hemisphere does that, and it generates images very rapidly to help you figure out what might be there. The left hemisphere takes that and develops it into something more articulated, algorithmic, and fully understood.

There's a dynamic balance between the right and the left hemisphere, where the left tries to impose order on the world—that's [Ramachandran](#), who's a very famous neurologist in California, and who also developed a theory like Goldberg's. He said that the left hemisphere imposed routinized order on the world, and the right hemisphere generates novelty, and reacts to novelty, and generates novel hypotheses. He thought—and there is some good evidence for this—that what's happening during the dream is that information has moved from the right hemisphere to the left hemisphere, in small doses, so that the novel revelations of the right hemisphere don't demolish the algorithmic structures that the left hemisphere has so carefully put together.

I like that theory, too, because it also does help justify the hypothesis that I've been laying out for you, which is that there's part of us that extends ourselves out into the world, and tries to understand what we don't know, and that that part extends itself out with behaviour, emotion, image, and then, maybe, with poetry and storytelling. As that develops, then we develop more articulated representations of that emergent knowledge. You can map that quite nicely onto the neurologist, and the neuropsychologist, presumption about what constitutes the reason for the hemispheric differentiation. The other thing that's so cool about the hemisphere differentiation argument, as far as I'm concerned—and this is really worth thinking about, man, because it's a real...There's a word that Ned Flanders uses for that...Noggin scratcher. I think it's something like that. Hah. Anyways, we do make the assumption that what it is that we are biologically



adapted to is reality. It's actually an axiomatic definition, if you're a Darwinian, because nature is what selects—by definition, that's what nature is: it's what selects. And if the nature that selects has forced upon you a dual hemispheric structure—because half of you has to deal with chaos, and half of you has to deal with order—then you can make a pretty damn good inferential case that the world is made out of chaos and order, and that's really something to think about, man. So you can think about that for a while, if you want.

Anyways, for whatever reason, there is a lot packed into these stories. Let's investigate a couple more of them. We'll start with the story of Adam and Eve. Now, you may remember that the Bible is a series of books. The Bible actually means something akin to library. These books were written by all sorts of different people, and groups of people, and groups of editors, and groups of people who edited over and over across very, very large periods of time. They are authored by no one and many at the same time. There was a tradition, for a long time, that the earliest books were written by Moses, but that's probably not technically correct, even though it might be dramatically correct, let's say, or correct in the way that a fairy tale is correct. I'm not trying to put down fairy tales by saying that.

There's a number of authors, and the way the authors have been identified, tentatively, is by certain stylistic commonalities across the different stories—different uses of words—like the words for God—different poetic styles, different topics, and so forth. People have been working for probably 200 years, roughly, to try to sort out who wrote what and how that was all cobbled together. It doesn't really matter for our purposes. What matters is that it's an aggregation of collected narrative traditions, and maybe you could say it's an aggregation of collective narrative wisdom. We don't have to go that far, but we can, at least, say it's aggregated narrative traditions.

There was some reason that those traditions, and not others, were kept. One of the things that's really remarkable about the Bible as a document is that it actually has a plot, and that's really something. I mean, it's sprawling, and it goes many places, but the fact that something's been cobbled together over several thousand years—4,000 years, maybe longer than that if you include the oral traditions that preceded it, and God only knows how old those are. Part of the human collective imagination has cobbled together a library with a plot. I see the Bible as a collective attempt by humanity to solve the deepest problems that we have. I think those are, primarily, the problems of self-consciousness—the fact that not only are we mortal, and that we die, but that we know it. That's the

unique predicament of human beings, and it makes all of the difference.

I think the reason that makes us unique is laid out in the story of Adam and Eve. Interestingly—and I really realized this only after I was doing the last three lectures—the Bible presents a cataclysm at the beginning of time, which is the emergence of self-consciousness in human beings. It puts a rift into the structure of being. That's the right way to think about it, and that's really given cosmic significance. Now, you can dispense with that and say, well, nothing that happens to human beings is of cosmic significance, because we're these short-lived, mole-like entities that are like cancers on this tiny planet that's rotating out in the middle of nowhere, on the edge of some unknown galaxy, in the middle of infinite space. Nothing that happens to us matters. That's fine, and you can walk down that road if you want. I wouldn't recommend it. I mean, that's part of the reason I think, for all intents and purposes, it's untrue: it isn't a road you can walk down and live well. In fact, if you really walk down that road, and you really take it seriously, you end up not living at all. It's certainly very reminiscent...I've talked to lots of people who are seriously suicidal, and the kind of conclusions that they draw about the utility of life prior to wishing for its cessation are very much like the kind of conclusions that you draw if you walk down that particular line of reasoning long enough.

If you're interested in that, you could read Leo Tolstoy's [Confession](#). It's a very short book, and it's powerful. Tolstoy describes his obsession with suicide when he was at the height of his fame: the most well-known author in the world, huge family, international fame, wealth beyond imagining at that time, influential, admired...He had everything that you could possibly imagine that everyone could have, and, for years, he was afraid to go out into his barn with a rope or a gun because he thought he'd either hang himself or shoot himself. He did get out of that, and he describes why that happened and where he went when that happened. If you're interested in that, that's a very good book.

The Biblical stories, starting with Adam and Eve, present a different story. They present the emergence of self-consciousness in human beings as a cosmically cataclysmic event. And you could say, well, what do we have to do with the cosmos? And the answer to that is, it depends on what you think consciousness has to do with the cosmos. Perhaps it's nothing, and perhaps it's everything. I'm going to go with everything, because that's how it looks to me. Of course, anyone who wishes to is welcome to disagree. But if you believe that consciousness is a force of cosmic significance, which being itself is dependent on—at least in any experiential sense—then it's not unreasonable to assume that

on—at least in any experiential sense—then it's not unreasonable to assume that radical restructuring of consciousness can worthily be granted some kind of cosmic or metaphysical significance. Even if it's not true from outside the human perspective—whatever that might be—it's bloody well true from within the human perspective, and that's for sure. That's the initial event, in some sense, after the creation: the cataclysmic fall. The entire rest of the Bible is an attempt to figure out what the hell to do about that.

In the Old Testament stories, for example, what seems to happen is that the state of Israel is founded. It rises and falls, and it rises and falls, and so there's this experimentation for centuries—millennia, even—with the idea that the way that you protect yourself against the tragic consequences of self-consciousness is by organizing yourself into a state. But then what happens is the state itself begins to reveal its pathologies. Those pathologies mount; the state becomes unstable and collapses, and then it rises back up, and then it becomes unstable and collapses, and then it rises back up—this is primarily from [Northrop Frye's](#) interpretations. People start wondering if there's not something wrong with the idea that the state itself is the place of redemption. There's something wrong with that idea. Then, on the heels of that, comes the Christian revolution, with its hypothesis that it's not the state that's the place of salvation: it's the individual psyche. And then there's an ethic that goes along with that, too, which is quite interesting.

The ethic of redemption after the state experiment fails, let's say, is that it's within the individual that redemption can be manifested—even insofar as the state is concerned, because the state's proper functioning is dependent on the proper functioning of the individual, rather than the reverse, most fundamentally. The proper mode of individual being that's redemptive is truth, and truth is the antidote to the suffering that emerges with the fall of man in the story of Adam and Eve. That relates back to the chapters that we've already talked about: there's an insistence in Genesis 1 that it's the word in the form of truth that generates order out of chaos, but even more importantly—and this is something that I most clearly realized just doing these lectures for the last three weeks—is that God continues to say, as he speaks order into being with truth, that the being he speaks into being is good. There's this insistence that the being that spoke into being, through truth, is good. There's a hint, here, right at the beginning of the story, about the state of being that Adam and Eve inhabited before they fell and became self-conscious—insofar as they were made in the image of God and acting out the truth that being itself was properly balanced. It takes the entire Bible to rediscover that, which is a journey back to the beginning. That's a

classic mythological theme: the wise person is the person who finds what they lost in childhood and regains it.

I think that's a Jewish idea. [Tzadik](#), if I remember correctly, is a messiah figure, and is also the person who finds what he lost in childhood and regains it. There's this idea of a return to the beginning, except that you don't fall backwards into childhood and unconsciousness: you return, voluntarily, to the state of childhood, well awake, and then determined to participate, through truth, in the manifestation of proper being. Now, I'm a psychologist, and I've taught personality theory for a very long time. I know profound personality theories pretty well. I'm reasonably well versed in philosophy—although not as well versed as I should be—but I can tell you, in all the things I've ever read, encountered, or thought about, I have never once found an idea that matches that in terms of profundity—not only profundity, but also in believability. The other thing I see as a clinician—and I think this is very characteristic of clinical experience, and also very much described, explicitly, by the great clinicians—is that what cures in therapy is truth. That's the curative.

Now, there's exposure to the things you're afraid of and avoiding, as well, but I would say that's a form of enacted truth: if you know there's something you should do by your own set of rules and you're avoiding it, then you're enacting a lie. You're not telling one, but you're acting one out. It's the same damn thing. So, if I can get you to face what it is that you're confronting, that you know you shouldn't be avoiding, then what's happening is that we're both partaking in the process of attempting you to act out your deepest truth. What happens is that it improves people's lives—it improves them radically, and the clinical evidence for that is overwhelming.

We know that if you expose people to the thing they're afraid of but avoiding, they get better. You have to do it carefully, cautiously, with their own participation, and all of that, but of all the things that clinicians have established—that's credible, and that's number one. That's nested inside this deeper realization that the clinical experience is redemptive. It's designed to address suffering insofar as the people who are engaged in the process are both telling each other the truth. And then you think, well, obviously, because if you have some problems and you come to talk to me about them—well, first of all, just by coming to talk to me about them you've admitted that they exist. That's a pretty good start. Second, well, if you tell me about them, then we know what they are, and then if we know what they are, then we can maybe start to lay out some

solutions. Then you can go act out the solutions to see if they work. But if you don't admit they're there and you won't tell me what they are, and I'm like posturing, acting egotistically, taking the upper hand, and all of that in our discussion—how the hell is that going to work? It might be comfortable moment-to-moment while we stay encapsulated in our delusion, but it's not going to work. If you think it through, it seems pretty self-evident.

Freud thought that repression was at the heart of much mental suffering. The difference between repression and deception is a matter of degree, and that's all. It's a technical differentiation. [Alfred Adler](#), who was one of Freud's greatest associates, let's say—and much under appreciated, I would say—thought that people got into problems because they started to act out a life lie. That's what he called it: a life lie. That's worth looking up, because Adler, although not as charismatic as Freud, was very practical, and he really foreshadowed a lot of later developments in cybernetic theory. Of course, Jung believed that you could bypass psychotherapy entirely by merely making a proper moral effort in your own life. [Carl Rogers](#) believed that it was honest communication, mediated through dialog, that had redemptive consequences. The behaviourists believe that you do a careful microanalysis of the problems that are laid before you and help introduce people to what they're avoiding. All of those things, to me, are just secular variations of the notion that truth will set you free, essentially.

It's a pretty powerful story. A, it's not that easy to dispense with, and B, the other thing is, you dispense with it at your peril. The people that I've seen who've been really hurt have been hurt mostly by deceit, and that's also worth thinking about. You get walloped by life. There's no doubt about that—absolutely no doubt about that. But I've thought for a long time that, maybe, people can handle earthquakes, cancer, even death, but they can't handle betrayal, and they can't handle deception—they can't handle having the rug pulled out from underneath them by people they love and trust. That just does them in. It makes them ill, and it hurts them: psychophysiologically, it damages them. But, more than that, it makes them cynical, bitter, vicious, and resentful. They start to act that all out in the world, and that makes it worse.

So God uses the spoken truth to create being that is good. The cataclysm occurs, and then human beings spend untold millennia trying to sort out exactly what to do about the fact that they've become self-conscious—and we are, in fact, self-conscious. No other animal has that distinction. Now, you'll read that if you put lipstick on a chimpanzee...which is kind of a strange thing to do. Hah. Well, I won't pursue that any further. But the chimpanzee will wipe off the lipstick if

you show it in the mirror. And dolphins seem to be able to recognize themselves in mirrors, so there is the glimmerings of self-conscious recognition in other animals. But to put that in the same conceptual category as human self-consciousness is...To my way of thinking, it's...Well, it's uninformed, to say the least, but I also think it's motivated by a kind of anti-humanistic, underlying motivation.

Your self-consciousness is so incredibly developed compared to that that they're hardly in the same conceptual universe. It's like comparing the alarm cries of vervet monkeys, when they see a predator, to the language of human beings. It's like, yea, yea. There's some similarities: they are utterances, and they are utterances with meaning, but they're not language. The self-consciousness of animals is proto-self-consciousness, and it's only there in a very small number of animals. It's nothing like ours. They're not aware of the future like we are. They're not aware of their boundaries in space and time, and that's the critical thing—most particularly time. Human beings discovered time, and when we discovered time, we discovered the end of each of our being. That made all the difference. That's what the story of Adam and Eve is about.

Genesis 1 was derived from the [Priestly source](#), where God is known as Elohim or El Shaddai. There's God in the singular, and there's Gods in the plural, and I suppose that's because it seems that, if you analyze the history of the development of monotheistic ideas, monotheism emerges out of a plurality of Gods. As I mentioned, I think it's because the Gods represent fundamental forces, at minimum, and those fundamental forces have to be hierarchically organized with something absolute at the top. Otherwise, they'd do nothing but war. You have to organize your values hierarchically, or you stay confused. That's true if you're an individual, and it's true if you're a state. If you don't know what the next thing you should do is, then there's 50 things you should do. How are you going to do any of them? You can't. You have to prioritize. Something has to be above something else. It has to be arranged in a hierarchy for it to not be chaotic. So there's some principle at the top of the hierarchy and, maybe, the organization of the Gods, over time. It's the battle of Gods that [Mircea Eliade](#) talked about. If you're interested in that, you could read *The History of Religious Ideas*, which I would really recommend. It's a three-volume book, and it's actually quite a straightforward read, as far as these things go. Eliade does a very nice job of describing how, and even why, polytheism tends towards monotheism. Even in polytheistic cultures, there's a strong tendency for the Gods to organize themselves in a hierarchy with one God at the top. In a

monotheistic culture, in some sense, all the other Gods just disappear across time, and there's nothing left but the top God. But, even in a polytheistic society, there's a hierarchy of power among the Gods.

The first story is newer than the second, so the story I'm going to tell you today is older than the one I already told you, even though their order was flipped by the redactor, who's the hypothetical person—or persons—who edited these stories together. I suspect it was a single person, but who knows. We don't know why the stories were edited together in the order that they were edited together, but we can infer—I mean, they were edited together in that order because the editor thought they made sense that way, because that's what an editor does. An editor tends to take diverse ideas and organize them in some manner that makes sense. Part of the manner that makes sense is that you can tell them to people, and the people stay interested, and people remember them. That's one of the ways you can tell if you've got an argument right, because it's communicable, understandable, and memorable. And so this person was, let's say, motivated by intuition to organize the stories in this particular manner.

The Jahwist strand contains the classic stories in the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, which we'll try to get through, perhaps, in these 12 lectures. We'll see how that goes. It's strongly anthropomorphic, so the God in the Jahwist account is, for all intents and purposes, some sort of meta-person. I dealt with that a little bit last week. People tend to think of that as unsophisticated, but when you think that the mind—the ground of consciousness—is the most complex thing that we know of, then it's not so unsophisticated to assume that the most complex thing that there might be is like that—or, at least, it's as good as we can do with our imaginations. I don't think it's so unsophisticated. It's also the case—and this is practically speaking—that it is not at all unreasonable to think of God the Father as the spirit that arises from the crowd and exists into the future. We talked about that in relationship to the idea of sacrifice, at least a little bit.

You make sacrifices in the present so that the future is happy with you. The question is, what is that future that would be happy with you? The answer to that is, it's the spirit of humanity. That's who you're negotiating with. You make the assumption that, if you forgo impulsive pleasure and get your medical degree, when you're done in 10 years, and you're a physician, humanity as such will honor your sacrifice and commitment and open the doors to you. You're treating the future as if it's a single being, and you're also treating it as if it's something



like a compassionate judge. You're acting that out. Once we started to understand that there was a future, perhaps we had to imagine God in that form in order to concretize something that we could bargain with—so that we could figure out how to use sacrifice and how to guide ourselves into the future. A sacrifice is a contract with the future. It's not a contract with any particular person: it's a contract with the spirit of humanity as such. It's something like that. When you think about it that way, that should make you faint with amazement, because that is such a bloody amazing idea to come up with, that you can bargain with the future.

That is some idea, man. That's like the major idea of human kind: We suffer. What do we do about it? We figure out how to bargain with the future, and we minimize suffering in that manner. No other animal does that, either. Lions—they just eat everything. I think a wolf can eat 40 pounds of meat in a single sitting. It's like, there's some meat—eat it. It's not like, save some mammoth for tomorrow. That's not a wolf thing, man. That's a human thing, and that might mean you have to be hungry today. Maybe you're a farmer 6,000 years ago when agriculture first got going, and you're starving to death waiting for the spring planting. You think, you bloody well better not eat those seeds. That's really something, to be able to control yourself to make the future real, and to put off what you could use today. And not just in some impulsive manner. Maybe your kids are starving to death. You think, we are not touching the seeds that we need for the future. And for human beings to have discovered that, and then to have also figured out that we could bargain with the future...Man, that's something. I think that the stories that are laid out in this book actually describe, at least in part, the process by which that occurred.

The Jahwist stories begin with Genesis 2:4: "This is the account of the heavens and the earth." There's two, real creation stories at the beginning: the newer one, which is the first one, and the older one, which is the second one. The older one begins in chapter 2, and that's the story that we are getting into now. Adam and Eve are in that, Cain and Abel, Noah, the Tower of Babel—in the Jahwist strand—Exodus, Numbers, and there's some of the Priestly version in there, too, as well as the 10 Commandments.

There's some lovely representations of paradise. This is [The Garden of Earthly Delights](#). Say that again? Bosch! Yes, [Hieronymus Bosch](#). A crazy—I mean, how he didn't get burnt at the stake is absolutely beyond me. I suppose most of you know about Salvador Dali—Dali's a piker compared to Hieronymus Bosch.



You could spend a very bizarre and surreal month looking at that painting. I don't know what it was with Bosch, but he was some sort of creature that only popped up once—and probably for the best. So there's been very many representations of paradise. God only knows what that is. I could probably guess, but I won't. That's the lion lying down with the lamb. That's this idea, that's maybe projected back in time, that there was a time, or maybe will be a time, when the horrors of life are no longer necessary for life itself to exist. The horrors of life are, of course, that everything eats everything else, and that everything dies, and that everything's born, and that the whole bloody place is a charnel house, and it's a catastrophe from beginning to end. This is the vision of it being other than that.

This was also implicit in the alchemical ideas, and I think it's also implicit in the scientific revolution: human beings can interact with reality in such a way so that the tragic and evil elements of it can be mitigated, and so that we can move somewhat closer to a state that might be characterized by something like that, where we have the benefits of actual existence without all of the catastrophe that seems to go along with it. Carl Jung, when he wrote about the emergence of science from alchemy, thought of science as being motivated by dream. For Jung, dream was the manifestation of the instincts. It was the boundary between the instincts and thinking. Science is nested inside a dream, and the dream is that, if we investigated the structures of material reality with sufficient attention and truth, we could then learn enough about material reality to alleviate suffering—to produce the philosopher's stone, make everybody wealthy, make everybody healthy, and to make everyone live as long as they wanted to live. That's the goal: to alleviate the catastrophe of existence. The solution to the mysteries of life that might enable us to develop such a substance—or, let's say, a multiple of substances—provided the motive force for the development of science.

Jung traced that development of force really over a thousand years. His books on alchemy are extraordinarily difficult, and that's really saying something about Jung, because all of his books are difficult. The books on alchemy kinda take a quantum leap... That's actually a very small leap, so I shouldn't say that. They take a massive leap into a whole different dimension of complexity. But that's what he was trying to get at. He went back into the alchemical texts and he interpreted them as if they were the dream on which science was founded. Newton was an alchemist, by the way. Jung's hypotheses are certainly well supported by the historical facts: science did emerge out of alchemy. The question is, what were the alchemists up to? They were trying to produce the

philosopher's stone, and that was the universal medicament for mankind's pathology.

Jung felt that what had happened was that Christianity had promised the cessation of suffering—promised it for a thousand years—yet suffering went on, unabated. At the same time, Christianity had attempted to really put emphasis on spiritual development, let's say, at the expense of material development—thinking of material development as something akin to a sin, trying to get control of impulsivity, and all the things that went along with a two-embodied existence. There was a reason for it, but by about 1,000 AD, the European mind—somewhat educated by that point, and somewhat able to concentrate on a single point, perhaps because of a very long history of intense religious training—turned its dream to the unexplored material world. The European mind thought, well, you know, the spiritual redemption that we've been seeking didn't appear to produce the result that was promised or intended, and so maybe there's another place that we should look—and that was in the damned, material world, which was supposed to be—at least, according to some elements of classic thinking—nothing but the creation of the devil.

The point I'm making is that it's very difficult to understand the amount of human motivation that's embedded in the attempt to alleviate suffering, eradicate disease, and to make things as peaceful as possible. I mean, you can be cynical about people, and you can talk about them as motivated by power, and being corrupt, and all of those things—and all of those things are true—but you shouldn't throw away the baby with the bathwater, because we have been striving for a very long time to set things right. We've done, actually, not too bad a job of it, for half-starving, crazy, insect-ridden chimpanzees with lifespans of 50 to 70 years. We deserve a bit of sympathy for our position, as far as I'm concerned.

Some other representations. This one I like—the one on the left. That's paradise as a walled garden, and that's what paradise means. It's *paradeisos*, which means walled garden. Why a walled garden? Well, it goes back to the chaos and order idea. A walled garden is where God puts man and woman after the creation. The wall is culture and order, and the garden is nature. The idea is that the proper human habitat is nature and culture in balance. Well, we like gardens. Why? Because they're not completely covered with weeds, mosquitos, and black flies, right? So they're civilized, a little bit, but within that civilization, nature, in its more benevolent guise, is encouraged to flourish. People find that rejuvenating. The idea that paradise—the proper habitat of a human being—is a walled garden

is a good one. It's walled because you want to keep things out—raccoons, for example. You want keep those things out, even though it's impossible. There's all sorts of things you don't want in your garden, like snakes. Walls don't seem to be much use against them. But the idea that paradise is a walled garden is an echo back to the chaos and order idea...Walls, culture, garden, nature...The proper human habitat is a properly tended garden..

The radical, left-leaning, anti-theist environmentalists tend to make the case that the predations of the Western capitalist system are a consequence of the injunction that was delivered in Genesis by God to man, to go out and dominate the earth. David Suzuki has talked a lot about this, by the way. They believe that that statement has given rise to our inappropriate assumption that we have the right to exert control over the world, and that that's what turned us into these terrible, predatory monsters—sometimes described as cancers on the face of the earth, or viruses that have inhabited the entire ecosystem, who are doing nothing but wandering everywhere and wreaking havoc as rapidly as we possibly can, which is another perspective on the essential element of humankind that I find absolutely deplorable. If you look at the historical record, for example, even casually, you'll find out that, as late as the late 1800s, Thomas Huxley—who's Aldous Huxley's grandfather, and a great defender of Darwin—prepared a report for the British government on ocean sustainability. He concluded that there's so many fish out there, the oceans are so inexhaustible, that no matter how humanity tried, for any number of years, the probability that we could do more than put a dent in what was out there was zero. Now, Huxley turned out to be wrong. He didn't realize that our population was going to spike so dramatically—partly because we got a little bit rich, and our children stopped dying at the rate of like 60 percent before they were 1 year old—and that we would actually manage to populate the earth with a few people.

It wasn't until 1960 or so that we woke up to the fact that there were so many of us that we actually had to start paying attention to what we were doing to the planet. That's like 50 years ago. Well, we've just started to develop the technology—the wherewithal—to understand that the whole world might be well considered a garden, and that we need to live inside the proper balance between culture and chaos. Before that, we were spending all of our time just trying not to die, and usually very unsuccessfully. So, I don't agree with that interpretation of the opening sections of Genesis: I don't believe that it's given human beings the right to act as super-predators on the planet. I think, instead, the proper environment for human beings is presented quite properly as a

garden, and that the role of people—and that's explicitly stated in the second story, in Adam and Eve—was to tend the garden. That means to make the proper decisions, and to make sure that everything thrives and flourishes, so that it's good for the things that are living there that aren't just people—but also good for the people, too. I think we can, at least, note that that's a slightly different take on the story than the ultimately cynical interpretation that's so commonly put forward today.

Now inside that walled garden is a couple of trees, Adam and Eve, some animals, and all of that. Unfortunately, the tree happens to have a snake wrapped around it. That's an interesting thing. We're going to talk about that a lot. The snake, in both of these representations, is no ordinary snake: it's got a human head, and it's got a human head, there, too. So, whatever that snake is... Well, forget about looking at this from a religious perspective. If you can't, just imagine that you're an anthropologist, and you've never seen this image before. What do you see? Well, you see walls, and you see a fairly pleasant enclosure. And then you see a tree, and people are eating from the tree. The tree has a snake in it that has a human head. You might think, well, what's a snake with a human head? And then you'd think, well, it's half snake and half human. That's hardly revelatory. It's just self evident. So, whatever that snake is, it isn't just a snake: it's snake and human—or it's snake and partakes in whatever human beings are. That's very important. We'll consider that later.

You see the same thing, here. You see in this particular version—there's the head. This one also has wings. This is a winged snake, sort of like a dragon, and it crawls on the ground like a reptile. It's got an aerial aspect, or a spiritual aspect. Here, it's a snake, which is like the lowest form of reptilian life—something that crawls on the ground. It's something that's human and spiritual at the same time. It inhabits the tree, which looks a lot like magic mushrooms, by the way. You can look that up, if you want. That's quite an interesting little rabbit hole to wander down if you're curious about it. But there's an idea here, too, that there is something in the garden at the beginning of time that was like a snake and like a person, that was like something that was winged and spiritual. So it's spiritual human and reptilian all at the same time, and it's the animating spirit of the tree. Ok, so keep that in mind.

"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished"—this is in relationship to Genesis 1—"and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because

that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made."

That's wisdom, too: the idea of the sabbath. I've worked with a lot of people who are hyper-conscientious. The thing about hyper-conscientious people is that they'll just work until they die, and that's actually not very productive, because then they're dead, and they can't work. What you have to do with hyper-conscientious people is you have to say, well, I know you'd rather do nothing but work, and maybe you're just as guilty as you can possibly be when you're not working, but let's figure out what you're up to. What you're up to, in all probability, is the attempt to be productive in the least problematic, longest sustaining, possible manner, and that might mean you have to take a rest.

I used to work with lawyers, people who had risen to the top of large law firms. They were hyper-productive types, and they're often trying to hit their impossible quota for yearly hours and burning themselves to a frazzle as a consequence. They couldn't work fewer hours a day, because that just didn't work, but we would have them take more time off, like a four-day weekend every two months—or something that was plotted out into the future—and then we'd track their billable hours, which is their degree of productivity. It would actually increase. That was so cool, because you could take hard working people, and you could say, take a break. Why? Well, because you'll be more productive if you take a break. No, that couldn't possibly be. I should just work flat out all the time. Let's test that out: you take a break now and then. What happened was their productivity would increase, often by 10 percent. So there's wisdom, here, too.

This alludes to the Adam and Eve story near the end: you're self-conscious, and you discover the future, and you have to work. Well, then the question is, how much should you work? One answer is, you better bloody well work all the time, because no matter how much work you do, you're not solving your problems. They're coming along, man. You can stack up all the money you want, and you can stack up all the wealth you want. It is not going to protect you in the final analysis, so you better be hitting the ground running, and you better run flat out all the time. What happens if you do that? Well, then you die. That's not a good solution. So, maybe you should rest. How does that rest get instantiated? It's not easy to tell, but one way to do it—let's say, conceptually—is to say, even God had to rest one day a week. You don't have to be so presumptuous to assume that, if God had to rest one day a week, maybe you are allowed to work nonstop without a break, at all.

I think our culture has slipped into that in quite a dangerous way. Everything is open all the time, and, I mean, I find that just as inconvenient as the rest of you. It's so strange to talk to modern people. One of the things they always tell you—we say, how are you? And what do they always say? They don't say good, and they don't say bad. They say busy. It's like, yea...

Ok, this is where Genesis 2 starts, and we finally got there. "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

Well, there's some archaic thinking in there. The breath is life. That's psyche, spirit, inspiration, respiration—that's all associated. It's [pneuma](#), like pneumatic tire, and it's breath. The reason that people associated life with breath...Well, that's not so foolish. I mean, you're breathing, man. When you die, you stop breathing. So the idea that there's something integral to life about breathing is a perfectly reasonable supposition that actually happens to be very true. Then, to associate the act of creation with the act of inspiration, respiration, and the breathing of life into something that was inanimate is...Well, what do you expect for a one-sentence description? It's not a bad one-sentence description.

"And the lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden."

Eden means well-watered place. That's particularly relevant, I suppose, if you're a desert-dweller: the issue is, can you get enough water to make things grow? The walled garden, which is paradise, is also Eden, which is a well-watered place. Water has the element of chaos. We already saw that in relationship to Genesis 1, where the underlying chaos was often assimilated, symbolically, to water. The idea, too, is that a certain amount of chaos has to be brought into the order, in order for it to be fruitful. You can see that in the form of allowing in the water.

"And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil."

So two trees are marked out among the rest: one is the tree of life, and one is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When you read something like that, if you're thinking about it, you're in a metaphorical space. We've got to be careful about metaphors, because I could say—and did—that the chaos and order idea is a metaphor. I also said, wait a second. It's a metaphor, but it's also what your brain is adapted to, and so let's not be pushing the idea that it's merely a metaphor too hard.

The same thing is happening, here. These are metaphors: the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But that doesn't exactly mean that they are mere metaphors. Sometimes—as I mentioned before—if you have a set of things and you abstract out from them a common element, you can make a strong case that the common element is more real than the set of things from which you abstracted it. That's the whole utility of abstraction. Why would you bother with it, otherwise? If you can't take a set of things, and say there's something in common across this set of things that's more important than the differences between them, then you wouldn't bother abstracting at all. The tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, are abstractions.

Now, one of the questions is—this is a tough one, man. I've been trying to figure it out for a long time—why a fruit, and something you eat, would be associated with the transformation of psychology? That's basically what happens in the Adam and Eve story. Why would it be something you eat? [Eric Neumann](#), who was one of Jung's students, had written a fair bit about this, and he got a fair ways with it. He said, well, you know, we've noticed forever that the act of eating—especially if you're hungry or starving—produces a rapid, spiritual transformation. Some of you probably have a crabby partner or child. One thing you might try is that, if they get erratic during the day, and get all volatile about nothing at all, just give them something to eat.

Really! I'll tell you, this solves—I do this with my clinical clients all the time. They tell me that they fly off the handle at the slightest things. When you're crabby and unreasonable, eat a piece of cheese, or eat a peanut butter sandwich. Eat something that's high protein and high fat, and then just wait 10 minutes and see if you're sane. You'll find out that you're so sane after you eat that you just can't believe how crazy you are when you're hungry. It's absolutely, bloody remarkable. Try this, especially if you don't eat breakfast. This will change your life. Here's a practical bit of information, too, for all of you antisocial types who are going to end up in prison: if you're in prison, and you want to go on parole—so you have to go in front of the judge and tell him why you're not going to do it

so you have to go in front of the judge and tell him why you're not going to do it again. Here's the deal: it doesn't really matter what you did, and it doesn't really matter what you promise. What matters is whether you see the judge before lunch or after lunch. If you see the judge after lunch, the probability that you'll get parole is 60 percent higher. Yea. That is just like... So, never have an argument with your partner when you're hungry, or when they're hungry—especially if you want something from them. It's like, here's a sandwich. They'll eat it, then you can manipulate them. Hah. Before that—no.

So it's not that unreasonable to think that there's a spirit in food, because food rejuvenates. It doesn't just rejuvenate you physically: it rejuvenates you spiritually. And then, of course, there's the other things that we consume, that aren't exactly like food, that have a wallop spiritual impact—like alcohol, let's say. That's a spirit, and it's regarded as Dionysus; the God of the vine that possesses you and makes you act in all the fun ways that alcohol makes you act—the fun ways that you regret the next day. And so there's the spiritual element of that, too. But there's something even deeper, that I think is so cool, that's associated with food and information. The story of Adam and Eve represented the fruit as producing a psychological transformation, and so the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is an abstraction across trees. It's trying to say, here's something that's common across trees—it's a fruit that's common across all trees. It's something like that.... The fruit that's common across trees is something that you might call food. That's a generalization, but fair enough.

Here's something that's even more cool: the food that's stable across the entire domain of food isn't food: it's information. It's information, and we use the same bloody circuits in our brain to forage for information that animals use to forage for food. It's the same circuit. Why is that? Because we figured out that knowing where the food is is more important than having the food. Knowing where the food is is a form of meta-food—information is a form of meta food, and that's why we're information foragers. That idea is embedded into the story of Adam and Eve: whatever it is that they ingest is a form of meta food. It's information. We'll trade food for information, right. If you're stuck on the edge of the highway, and your hood's up, and you're going-places thing has turned into a pile of junk that you don't understand, and a mechanic pulls up beside you, and they point to something and say, just put that wire back on there, you'll immediately give them a sandwich, right? Or you'll offer them something in return. You know what I mean, because they provided you with information that has value, and it has value because it actually provides you with energy. Information provides you with energy. Otherwise, why would we bother with it?



So food provides energy, but so does information. There's the idea of food that you abstract from everything that you can eat, but then there's the idea of what you could abstract from all sources of food, and the answer to that would be information. The trees that are being referred to in Adam and Eve are these meta-trees. They're no ordinary trees, just like paradise is no ordinary place, just like Adam and Eve are no ordinary people, and just like the logos that God is using at the beginning of time is no ordinary conception. They're not metaphors; they're more than metaphors. I think of them as hyper-realities. They're more real than what you see. They're more real than the reality that presents itself to you. Lots of things are like that—numbers are like that. You would not think or abstract if there weren't things that were more real than what we can see. So, what's most real? Well, that's partly what we're trying to figure out.

"And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads."

That's produced a tremendous amount of speculation. The garden of Eden is also the holy city—that's another way of thinking about it—or it's Jerusalem, or it's the ideal state, which could be the ideal city, or it could be the ideal state of being, or it could be the ideal psyche. It's all of those things stacked up at the same time.

This is the mandala form that people hypothesized constituted the structure of paradise. You notice it's got this cross form. That's Eden itself. There's the center of Eden, and there's the rivers. Those are rivers, not snakes. Those are the rivers that go out of it, and they're turned into these mandala images that are representative of what Jung described as the self, which would be the center element of conscious being that he associated with divinity, and also with the idea of the holy city. I'm just showing you that to show you where the imagination has taken ideas of paradise. "The name of the first river is Pison: that is which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; And the God of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone. And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates." There's this strange intermingling, there, of geography with mythical geography, which you see happen fairly frequently in the books. "And the Lord God took the man, and

see happen fairly frequently in the books. And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and keep it." That's a good command. That's what you're supposed to do: take care of the damn thing. It's a lot of work to make—it took a whole week. Hah. "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

Well, there's a bunch of questions, there, that people have been puzzling over for a long time. God is a tricky character in the story of Adam and Eve. It's like, ok, if we can't eat the damned thing, why put it in the garden to begin with? That would be one question. You made us, and then you told us not to eat this, knowing perfectly well that the first thing we were going to do was eat it, because people are of exactly that type. If you say to them, with their insatiable curiosity, this is all fine and nice, but over here is something that you should never look at, and you leave the room...It's like, everybody's over there trying to figure out what the hell that thing is, instantly, right? We're curious, curious, curious, curious creatures. You have to wonder what, exactly, God was up to here.

There's [Gnostic](#) speculation that the original God, this one, was not really a very good God. He was kind of an unconscious, evil God. He wanted his creation to be unconscious, and so forbade them from developing consciousness. It was a higher God, and maybe in the form of the serpent, who tempted human beings towards consciousness. That idea got scrubbed out of classic Christianity pretty early, although there's something that's interesting about it, and there are remnants of it in different forms that stayed inside the story—like the idea that the fall was a terrible tragedy, but, on the other hand, it was the precondition for the greatest event in history, which was the birth of Christ and the redemption of mankind. And so it's complicated. Let's put it that way.

God only knows what God was up to. This is a good example of that ambivalence. To me, again, it's an indication of the sophistication of the people who put these stories together. I also consider this somewhat miraculous, because, you know, if you're just a simple propagandist, you wouldn't leave this sort of complexity in the text. You'd just get rid of that. If you're a propagandist, everything is supposed to make sense along the ideological plane. Here, God's supposed to be good, and it's like, well, we better get rid of that line, because something's up with it, and it isn't obvious what it is. But that isn't what people did. To me, that indicates that they were doing two things: they were trying not

to be too careless with the traditions that they were handed—they were very careful with them, and they were touching them at their peril—and they were actually trying to understand what was going on. Otherwise, why keep this? Why not just simplify it? Or, maybe just attribute this to the devil. That would be easier than having God do it.

"And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all the cattle"—cattle means animal, basically—"and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him."

Well, a couple of things to speculate, there. Number one: why does God care what Adam calls the animals? The answer to that seems to be that it's associated, again, with the magic of speech. We know—according to the story—that human beings were already made in the image of God, and that God used language in order to call order forth from chaos. There's an echo of that, here, even though it's from an independent tradition. The echo is that the thing isn't quite real until you name it. That's an interesting thing, and we don't exactly know how far that extends. It's certainly the case that things often exist in a strange potential form—interconnected form—where everything's a mass of confusion before you put your finger on it and name it. What's going on, here? You name it...It's like, it carves it out from all that underlying chaos and makes it into a grippable entity that you can then contend with. You might say, well, it was real before you named it. Well, yes. It was real before you named it—the same way things are there when there's no one there to perceive them. It isn't obvious how things are there when you're not there to perceive them.

I'll tell you something bloody weird about perception. [John Wheeler's](#) a physicist, and here's a really cool thing: Let's say you go outside at night, and you look up, and you see a star. A photon from that star enters your eye, and maybe that photon has been cruising along for like 30 million years. Do you know that that photon would not have been emitted from that star at that time if your eye wasn't there at that time to perceive it? You think, well, how in the hell can that be? It happened 30 million years ago. Well, I don't know how it can be, to tell you the truth, but I know that John Wheeler has done a very good job of detailing out why that's true, and necessarily true. Wheeler is also the physicist

who developed the notion of [it from bit](#). He believes that the potential of the world is best construed as a place of latent information. What consciousness does is transform the latent information into something like concrete reality. He doesn't mean that metaphorically. One of the cases that he makes, in that regard, is the story that I just told you: the photon couldn't have left from where it was unless it had a place to go.

It's complicated and confusing, because, from the perspective of a beam of light from a photon, there is no time, and there is no distance from one point to another. Of course, that's completely impossible to understand, too. But, from the perspective of a photon, the universe is completely flat—perpendicular to the direction that the photon is travelling. It's there, and here, at the same time. For us, it's not. It's like 20 million years ago. But for the photon, it's all here and now. Anyways, the reason I'm telling you all that is because the relationship between consciousness and reality is by no means straightforward. It is seriously not straightforward. Physicists debate what the relationship is between consciousness and reality, and they debate about what the sort of phenomena that I just described means. I'm not really qualified to enter into that debate, because I'm not a physicist, but I have read a fair bit of Wheeler—about as much of it as I can understand—and I do, at least, know that that's what he claimed. I also know that that claim is taken seriously among the calibre of the physicists who can understand Wheeler. That's pretty interesting.

So, anyways, there is emphasis, again, on this importance of naming in order to make things real. You know, sometimes people won't name things just so they don't become real. If you have a relationship—which, undoubtedly, you do—and it has problems—which, undoubtedly, it does—you bloody well know that lots of times there's something under the carpet that no one wants to name.

Everybody's thinking, well, as long as we don't name it, it's not really there. In some sense it really isn't there, because you can act as if it's not there and get away with it, at least for short periods of time. But as soon as you name that thing you give it form, and it's there, and no one can ignore it. That's annoying, because then you have to deal it or face the consequences. The reason I'm telling you that is because we have an intuition that we can have things not exist by not naming them. You name it and it comes forward with staggering clarity. It's not as if naming it is the only thing that gives it reality, but it sharpens it, brings it into focus, and gives it borders and boundaries.

Anyways, God's interested enough in what Adam has to say that he has him

name all the animals, and that sort of makes them into animals. Now, there's more to the linguistic story than that. Social psychologist [Roger Brown](#) studied this really interesting phenomena, which is associated with relationship between perception and action. You know how a kid will call a particular animal a cat? Well, the word cat is very short, like the word dog. We could perceive cats as multicellular organisms—we could see the cells; we could see the molecules; we could see the atoms, or we could see the ecosystem that the cat is part of—or maybe the broader, mammalian classification that it's part of. We could perceive that as the unit of perception, but we don't. We perceive things at the level of cat. You can tell the perceptual level that people naturally perceive at—which doesn't seem to be socially-culturally determined to any great degree, by the way—because the words are often short, easily remembered, and early-learned. There's this level of analysis, out of all the possible levels of analysis, that the world does exist at what we perceive it at. That level of analysis seems to have something to do with the world's functional utility for us. The perception at that level, and the naming at that level, gives things a reality at that level.

The thing about things is that they're not easily separable from other things. They tangle together in all sorts of strange ways. Yet, when we cast our eye and use our language to orient ourselves in the world, we cut things up into discreet, discriminable objects that we can then utilize. There's something about that that makes them more real, in a way, than the interconnected potential that they were before—it's not real in the same way, at least. I think it's even less real. I think that's a right way of thinking about it, even though it's not completely unreal. It's an echo. Adam's a little God at that point—a little God the Father, and God's already done the ground work, but Adam has to come along and say, well, that's a cat. Like, poof: whatever that is is now a cat, and that's a dog, and that's a sheep. It gives them something like pragmatic form.

"But for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from the man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

That's a wallowing statement to put in there at the end of those three sentences. The "therefore" comes as somewhat as a surprise, but there's an injunction there

It therefore comes as somewhat of a surprise, but there's an injunction there. It's a good injunction. Man, I tell you, people who don't do that have a hell of a time in their marriage. This is a good thing to know if you are married, or if you're planning to get married: We have very strong orientation towards our parents, and for good reason. The injunction, here, is that's secondary as soon as you're married, and failure to do that makes your marriage collapse—and you deserve it to collapse, too, as far as I'm concerned, because it's a reflection of your pathological immaturity and your unwillingness to extract yourself from the talon-like grip of parents, who are a little bit too much on the interfering side. But the injunction...There's a deep injunction, here. It's very complicated.

One of the ideas is that the original Adam wasn't a man: he was more like a hermaphroditic being. In that hermaphroditic being, there was a kind of undifferentiated perfection that was split into male and female. Part of the goal of human beings is to reunite as the singular unity that reestablishes the initial perfection. That's actually the goal of marriage from the spiritual perspective. Jung wrote quite a bit about that. It's such a good idea.

I had these friends that went to Sweden to get married. They were from Northern Alberta, but both their heritages were Swedish. They did this cool thing as they were being married: they had to hold a candle up between them while they were being married. You think, well, what's the candle? It's a source of light; it's a source of illumination; it's a source of enlightenment; it's the candle that you put on Christmas trees in Europe. So it's the light that emerged in the darkness, in the depth of winter. It's a symbol of life in darkness; it's the reemergence of the sun at the darkest, coldest time of the year—which is also associated, symbolically, with the birth of Christ for all sorts of complicated reasons. So the candle's all that. The next question is, why do you hold it above you? Because what's above you is what you're below to. It signifies something transcendent. Why do you both hold onto it? Because you're both supposed to hold onto the light, right? And you're supposed to be subordinate to the light. You ask, well, who's in charge in a marriage? Well, the light! That's the idea. So you come together as one thing. You're no longer two things. It isn't what's good for you, and it's not what's good for your wife: it's what's good for the marriage. The marriage is about the combined being, which is the reassembly of the original hermaphroditic being at the beginning of time. That's the idea, and that's all packed into these four sentences.

All of these sentences have a tremendous history of interpretation associated with them. It's just endless, and that's one of the lines. It's also an antidote to the

idea that women taken out of men—which is also the reverse of the biological process, by the way—makes women, in some sense, subordinate to men. That is not built into this text. I don't see that, at all, as built into the text.

There's something else that's associated with it, too. The reason Sleeping Beauty goes to sleep is because—you have to remember what happens. She has parents who are quite old, and so they're pretty desperate to have a child—like so many people are now. They only have one child—like so many people do now—and they don't want anything to happen to this child. It's a miracle, and there's only one of them, and she's the princess, and so we're not letting anything around her. They have a big christening party, and they invite everybody, but they don't invite Maleficent. Maleficent is the terrible mother; she's nature; she's the thing that goes bump in the night; she's the devil herself, so to speak, and she's everything that you don't want your child to encounter.

So the king and queen saying, well, we just won't invite her to the christening... It's like, good luck with that. That's an Oedipal story, right? the Oedipal mother is the mother who devours her child by overprotecting him or her, so that instead of being strengthened by an encounter with the terrible world, they're weakened by too much protection. And then, when they're let out into the world, they cannot live. That's the story of Sleeping Beauty, and that's what the king and queen do. They apologize to Maleficent when she first shows up. They have a bunch of half-witted excuses why they didn't invite her. We forgot—I don't think so. You don't forget something like that. And she kind of makes that point: you don't just forget about the whole horror of life when you have a child. You might wish that it might stay at bay, but you do not forget about it. The question is, do you invite it to the party? And the answer is, it bloody well depends how unconscious you want your child to be. If you want your child to be unconscious, well, then you have the added advantage that, maybe, they won't leave home. You can take advantage of them for the rest of your sad life, instead of going off to find something to do for yourself. And then, of course, you can take revenge on them if they do have any what you call impetus towards courage, that you sacrificed in yourself 30 years ago, and that you want to stamp out as soon as you see it develop in your child. That's another thing that would be quite pleasant.

That's what happens in Sleeping Beauty. Well, none of this is pleasant, and nothing that happens in that story is pleasant. Sleeping Beauty is naive as hell. They put her out in the forest and have her raised by these three goody-two-shoes faeries that are also completely devoid of any real potency and power

shoes ladies, that are also completely devoid of any real potency and power. There's nothing maleficent about them. And then she falls in love so badly with the first idiot prince that wanders by that she has post-traumatic stress disorder when he rides off on his horse. That's what happens. And then she goes into the castle, and she's all freaked out because she met the love of her life for like five minutes, for God's sake. That's when the spinning wheel—that's the wheel of fate—pops up, and she pricks her finger. They tried to get rid of the wheels of fate, with their pointed end, but she finds it, pricks her finger, and falls down, unconscious. Well, she wants to be unconscious, and no bloody wonder. She was protected her whole life, and she's so damn naive that her first love affair just about kills her. She wants to go to sleep and never wake up, and so that's exactly what happens. And then she has to wait for the prince to come and rescue her. Well, you think, how sexist can you get? Seriously, because that's the way that that would be read in the modern world—it's like, she doesn't need a prince to rescue her. That's why Disney made *Frozen*, that absolutely appalling piece of rubbish.

You can say, well, the princess doesn't need a prince to rescue her, but, you know, that's a boneheaded way of looking at the story. The prince isn't just a man who's coming to rescue the woman—and, believe me, he's got his own problems, right? He's got a whole goddamn dragon he has to contend with. The prince also represents the woman's own consciousness. Consciousness is presented very frequently in stories as symbolically masculine, as it is with the logos idea. The idea is that, without that forward-going, courageous consciousness, a woman herself will drift into unconsciousness and terror. You can read it as, well, the woman who's sleeping needs a man to wake her up. Of course—just like a man needs a woman to wake him up. It's the same damn thing: that's the dragon fight in *Sleeping Beauty*. But it's also the case that, if she's only unconscious, all she can do is lay there and sleep like the sleep of the naive and damned. She has to wake herself up and bring her own masculine consciousness into the forefront so that she can survive in the world. Of course, women are trying to do that like mad, but that's partly what's represented in a story like that. That's partly what's implicit in this idea: unless the woman is taken out of man, so to speak, then she isn't a human being: she's just a creature. That's partly what's embedded in this story. So you don't want to read it as a patriarchal... You don't want to read anything that way, really. I won't bother with that. But, really, we can do better than that.

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."



The other thing about marriage—this is really worth knowing, too, and I learned this, in part, from reading Jung. What do you do when you get married? That's easy: you take someone who's just as useless and horrible as you are, and then you shackle yourself to them, and then you say, we're not running away, no matter what happens. Yea. That's perfect, because then you don't get to run away. The thing is, if you can run away, you can't tell each other the truth. If you tell someone the truth about you and they don't run away, then they weren't listening. If you don't have someone around who can't run away, then you can't tell them the truth. That's part of the purpose of the marriage. It's like, I'll bet on you, and you bet on me. It's a losing bet—we both know that—but, given our current circumstances, we're unlikely to find anyone better.

Two things that come off of that... You know, people are waiting around to find Mr. or Mrs. Right. Here's something to think about, man, and to put yourself on your feet: if you went to a party and found Mr. Right, and he looked at you and didn't run away screaming, that would indicate that he wasn't Mr. Right, at all. It's like the old Nietzschean joke: if someone loves you, that should immediately disenchant you with them. Or it's the Woody Allen joke: I never belonged to a club that would take me as a member. That's a very interesting thing to think about.

You're going to shackle yourself to someone who's just as imperfect as you are. Then the issue is, you might be in a situation where you can actually negotiate. You might think, well, there's some things about you that aren't going so right, and there's some things about me that aren't going so right, and we're bloody well stuck with the consequences for the next 50 years. We can either straighten this out or suffer through it for the next five decades. People are of the sort that, without that degree of seriousness, those problems will not be solved. You'll leave things unnamed, because there's always an out. It's the same thing when you're living together with someone. People who live together before they're married are more likely to get divorced, not less likely. The reason for that is, what exactly are you saying to one another when you live with each other? Just think about it. Well... For now, you're better than anything else I can trick, but I'd like to reserve the right to trade you in—hah—conveniently, if someone better happens to stumble into me.

Well, how could someone not be insulted to their core by an offer like that? They're willing to play along with it, because they're going to do the same thing with you. That's exactly it: yea, yea. I know you're not going to commit to me

with you. That's exactly it. yea, yea...I know you're not going to commit to me, so that means you don't value me or our relationship above everything else. But, as long as I get to escape if I need to, then I'm willing to put up with that. That's a hell of a thing. You might think, how stupid is it to shackle yourself to someone? It's stupid, man. There's no doubt about that. But compared to the alternatives? It's pretty damn good. Without that shackling there are things you will never, ever learn, because you'll avoid them. You can always leave, and if you can leave, you don't have to tell each other the truth. It's as simple as that. You can just leave, and then you don't have anyone you can tell the truth to.

This is an old Chinese symbol. I think it's [Fuxi](#) and [Nuwa](#). I think I have the pronunciation wrong, but it's really cool. See the snakes, down here? They're kinda like the DNA symbol, which I find very interesting. That's the original cosmic serpent—the potential out of which that emerged—then that's the differentiation of that into male and female. So that's like the predatory unknown. That's one way of thinking about it. The most fundamental conception of mankind is the predatory unknown, and then the bifurcation of that into the two fundamental, cognitive elements of human perception: masculine and feminine.

You see the same thing, here. This is Egyptian. and also extraordinarily old. It's the great serpent that underlies everything, bifurcating itself into Isis, queen of the underworld, and Osiris, king of kings, pharaoh, king of order.

You see the same thing in an old alchemical symbol. I love this one because it looks quite a lot like the little thing that Harry Potter chases around. That's not accidental, by the way. The Seeker is the thing that chases this, and the Seeker that chases this and catches it wins. That's a really old idea. I cannot figure out how the hell J. K. Rowling knew that, because that is a very, very archaic and arcane symbol. On Google it's called the round chaos, and the only reference to the round chaos that I can find on Google is on my webpage. And so I have no idea how Rowling came up with that. I mean, I know she looked at a lot of old texts, but the idea that if you play the meta-game and you catch this, you win all the games, is exactly right. That's the motif for...What's the name for that... Quidditch.

There's the potential—that's like the potential out of which God made the world at the beginning of time. That's the dragon. In the dragon fight, that's partly the serpent that's in the garden of Eden. And then that's the manifestation of masculine and feminine out of that. Potential, predatory, unknown, masculine,

and feminine. It's like a single representation of the evolutionary history of human cognitive consciousness. It's so cool. And that's also an image of the ideal: it's the union of sun and moon, and it's this hyper-creature, hermaphroditic, that's also the Adam and Eve that existed at the beginning of time before the fall. It's the purpose of marriage, and it's a sacrament. All of that in these images. It's just absolutely unbelievable what images can pack into them.

And there's some more classical representations of Eve being extracted from Adam. This is a cool line: "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." Well, someone who wrote that would only write like that if they were surprised they weren't ashamed, because why would you point it out, otherwise? There's this intimation of two things: Number one is, there was a point in time when human beings were naked, and they weren't ashamed of it. Number two is, there is a point in time—which is now—when they are naked, and they are ashamed of it. The question is, well, what's associated with nakedness and shame? That's often given a sexual connotation in classic interpretations of the Adam and Eve story—because of its association with nudity, I presume. But I think it's a lot more complicated than that.

My daughter...She probably won't be very happy that I'm revealing this in this lecture. My daughter was never really concerned about nudity. When she was a little kid, it was all the same to her, one way or another. But my son, by the time he was three, man, that kid was private. His bedroom door was shut. The bathroom door was shut. It was like, get the hell out of here. That seemed to just happen of its own accord. You know, we had two children, and one was like that, and the other one wasn't. I didn't think we had much to do with it, at all. It was really fascinating to watch that emerge in him. That sense of self-consciousness does seem to emerge in children who are around the age of three. That's, generally, also when we start thinking that maybe having your baby wander around naked on a beach isn't exactly the best idea.

Nudity in children is generally ok, under some circumstances, in public display. We seem to think of that as merely—it's acceptable. Why? I don't know. Why it stops being acceptable? Well, that has something to do with sexuality, obviously, but it's a very complicated phenomena. The whole nudity thing is a very complicated thing. I mean, first of all, people are kind of strange, because we're hairless—well, compared to most animals—and we don't know why that is. Some people think it's because we lost our hair when we were wandering around

in Africa. We're really, really good runners. We can run down animals. A human being in good shape can run a horse to death in a week. We can really run, man, and a lot of our ancestors—the [Kalahari](#) bushmen still do this: they just run an animal until it dies. They also, sometimes, shoot them with poison arrows, but they can just run them until they die. We have tremendous endurance, and you have to be able to get rid of a lot of heat if you're going to run around in the desert, so we don't have much hair.

[Buckminster Fuller](#) had an interesting explanation. He thinks that, at some point during our evolution, we spent a lot of time near the water—we were like fish-apes, something like that. Well, we like to be on the beach, and there's lots of food there, and we like to swim. We're really good at swimming, for terrestrial creatures, and we cry salt tears, like some sea-going creatures do. Women have a layer of [subcutaneous fat](#), like some sea-going creatures do. Our feet—very odd things—are kind of good for flapping in the water, although we can also walk with them. And so he thought that, maybe, that adaptation was to a water existence, like seals and so forth—like we kinda went back to the ocean, but not quite.

Anyways, the evolution of that hairlessness is an interesting thing. It certainly does make us exposed to the world in a way that animals that have a covering of fur aren't. And then we're upright, which is very strange because most animals aren't. They're on all fours, so their very vulnerable parts are protected and not exposed to view. Of course, when you're standing up, nude, your psychophysiological quality is on painful display. People complain about that all the time. If you look at the feminist tact, for example, on beauty, the idea that women have eating disorders is directly attributed to the presence of too many beautiful women on the covers of magazines—even though women buy those magazines, and they're attracted to them, and their mood goes up when they purchase them. If the stimulus was negative, the women would avoid the magazines, and not buy them. So, as a theory, it's a very, very bad one. But it's still the case that standards of beauty shame people, and that's for sure. If you're not ugly now, man, you're gonna be at some point in your life.

That's kind of a rough thing to contend with. It's a rough thing to know that there's an ideal that you could be—and maybe even once were—that you're not going to be for long, or never were. I think it's harder on women, because women are judged by men more for their youth and fertility. That's how it turns out from the evolutionary point of view. Men are judged more on their socioeconomic status by women. It's harsh both ways. So, anyways, it's a

socioeconomic status by women. It's harsh both ways. So, anyways, it's a terrible thing to carry the knowledge with you that you're exposed to the most serious possible evaluation of the quality of your being that you could possibly be exposed to, all the time, and that that's further amplified if you're without clothing. Part of clothing is protection, but a tremendous amount of it is merely stopping other people from evaluating you too harshly all the time; it just gets in the way. Anyways, this story makes the case that, at some point, we weren't like that. Animals aren't like that, so it seems perfectly plausible that we weren't like that. But, at some point, that changed.

"And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"

I like this. I can't remember who did the etching. Who is it? [Dore!](#) Yea. Dore did etchings for Paradise Lost that are absolutely remarkable. This is Satan, and this is the snake, here. Of course, in the Genesis stories, Satan is weirdly associated with the snake. That's a tough one to sort out. In the story of Adam and Eve, there's no indication, whatsoever, that the serpent who tempts Eve is also Satan, the author of all evil. And how in the world those two stories got tangled together—well, I think I figured that out. I'm going to tell you that tonight, but it took a very long time to figure it out. It's so bloody brilliant. I just can't believe that people figured it out. It's so unbelievably, spectacularly brilliant. That's an intimation of that idea, right? That there's a kinship between these two things.

Anyways, the serpent's more subtle than any beast of the field. Subtle's an interesting word. We'll amplify the word a bit—this is what you do in Jungian dream interpretation: you kind of look at the connotation of the concepts that are associated with the dream. This is from the Oxford English Dictionary: Subtle: "Of a person or animal, an action, behaviour, etc.: crafty, cunning; sly, treacherous." It's something that sort of sneaks along, right? It's not something that you really pick up on that easily.

"Of a look or glance: sly, furtive; surreptitious. Of a person: skillful; expert; clever. Of a work of art, mechanical device, etc.: cleverly made or designed; ingenious."

Well, I think all those terms, so far, are fairly well attributed to snakes. I mean, they are very cool things, and they are very well designed. They're quite

remarkable, and they're also very subtle.

"Of the nature of or involving careful discrimination or fine points; difficult to understand, abstruse. Of a person, the mind, or intellectual activity; characterized by wisdom or perceptiveness; discriminating, discerning, and shrewd."

That's interesting, because Milton's Satan is also the intellect, and you see that very often. It's so often the bad guy's an evil scientist. You see the same thing in The Lion King, with Scar. Scar's an intellect—an arrogant, deceitful intellect. There's nothing stupid about Scar. He's not wise, but he's the evil voice that's always whispering in the king's ear. That's associated with the pride of the intellect. Catholics had warned humanity about the pride of the intellect for centuries. That's partly what produced the schism between Catholicism and science, although that's much overrated if you look at the historical record. The idea was that the intellect has a remarkable faculty, and it's the highest angel in God's heavenly kingdom. That's the way that Milton portrayed it. But it's also the thing that can go most terribly wrong, because the intellect can become arrogant about its own existence and accomplishments, and it can fall in love with its own products. That's what happens when you're ideologically possessed, because you end up with a human constructed dogma. In Solzhenitsyn's words, "it possesses you completely of which you believe is 100 percent right." It eradicated the necessity for anything transcendent. So that's the subtil element of the intellect that's associated, symbolically, with the snake in the garden of paradise.

"Of a feeling, sense, sensation, etc.: acute, keen. Involving distinctions that are fine or delicate, esp. to such an extent as to be difficult to discern or analyze; (also) almost imperceptible and elusive. Having little thickness or breadth; thin, fine. Subtile matter; rarefied matter." Barely there at all. "And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil."

Sneaky. Subtle. It's a nice story, eh? The instant implication is, well, you can't trust God. That's pretty sneaky. And the next is, well, he's trying to pull a fast one on you. And the next one is, well, he's trying to do that because he's jealous, and he doesn't want you to know things that he knows, because that wouldn't be

so good. And he's lying to you, anyways, because you're not going to die. If you eat it, contrary to what you've been informed, all that's going to happen is your eyes will be opened, and you'll be like Gods, knowing good and evil. That sounds pretty damn good. I mean, Eve, what does she know? No wonder she's susceptible to such blandishments. It's quite interesting, too, because God tells Adam and Eve not to eat the damn fruit, but they never promise not to. They haven't promised; they've just been told to, and, well, should they be obedient? How obedient do you want your children to be? You want them to be obedient enough so that they don't get hurt, but disobedient enough so that they go out in the world and do something courageous, break some rules, and learn some things. It's a very paradoxical story.

Anyways, the serpent wins this round. Eve pays attention to the snake. Again, we have the same set of images: we have Adam, and we have Eve. We have this tree, and we have this strange serpent. That's a dragon-like form, there—a sphinx-like form that's associated with the tree. The snake's eternally associated with the tree. We spent God only knows how many tens of millions of years as tree-dwelling primates, and we had three primary predators: snakes, birds, cats. And so the snake has been associated with the tree for a very, very long time. The lesson the snake tells people is, you bloody better well wake up, or something you don't like will get you. And who's going to be most susceptible to paying attention to the snake? That's going to be Eve. The reason for that is that Eve has offspring, and there's nothing tastier to a snake than a child.

Eve had every reason to be self-conscious and neurotic. Women are more self-conscious and neurotic by men than quite a substantial amount. That's true cross-culturally, and it emerges at puberty, and part of the reason—as far as we can tell—is women are more sexually vulnerable. They're also smaller. So that's a problem if you're engaged in any physical altercation. But most importantly is, why would you ever assume that a human female's nervous system is adapted to her or her well-being? Why wouldn't you assume, instead, that her nervous system is adapted to the female-infant dyad? Because if it isn't, then the infants die. And so you might think, well, women are way more susceptible to depression and anxiety than men are. That's a hell of a burden to bear, and that's also true cross-culturally, by the way, and it also kicks in at puberty.

The biggest differences are in Scandinavia—for those of you who think it's sociocultural, which it isn't. But there's reasons for it, and it's also at puberty that men and women start to become sexually dimorphic in terms of size. Men are way more powerful in their upper bodies. It's incomparably more powerful

are way more powerful in their upper bodies. It's incomparably more powerful, and so that makes them a lot more dangerous. The primary human defense mechanism is punching, like with kangaroos. There's some other animals that can punch. Chimps can punch, too, but human beings punch, and most of the force in that is upper body and shoulder, and so a woman is no match for a man in a fight. She has every reason to be nervous, especially when you add to that her additional sexual vulnerability and the fact that she has to take care of extraordinarily dependent infants, who are extremely fragile for a very long period of time. And women are more self-conscious than men. The empirical literature on that is clear. It's associated with trait neuroticism, because self-consciousness is actually an unpleasant emotion. Who wants to be self-conscious? If I'm self-conscious on the stage while I'm talking to you, then all of a sudden I can't even talk to you. All I'm doing is thinking about me and all the things that are wrong with me, and I fall inside myself. Self-consciousness, although it's a great gift, is nothing pleasant. It's associated, primarily, with anxiety.

So Eve had every reason to pay attention to the snake, and that's for sure. I think I read this week that—I can't remember which tribesmen it was, unfortunately. Although, I did put a footnote in my new book about this. These were tribal people, and five percent of the adults had been attacked by a python, and a substantial number of children had been killed by them. Snake predation was no joke. It shaped our evolutionary past, and, in many places, it still is no joke.

[Lynne Isbell](#), an anthropologist, pointed out that we're attuned to snakes. We got really good at detecting the camouflage patterns of snakes, especially in the lower half of our visual field. There's evidence that part of the reason that human beings have such acute vision—which means that our eyes opened, let's say—is because we coevolved with snakes. We learned how to see them, and then the price we paid for seeing was that our brain grew. You need a lot of brain in order to see, and the consequence of our brain growing is that one day we woke up and discovered the future, and the future is where all the snakes might live, instead of where they live right now.

There's the same thing. These images are so interesting. In this one you have the spectre of death, in the tree, with the snake and the fruit. Now, fruit is interesting, too. I already made the case that there's a tight linkage between what you eat and information—a conceptual link, as well as a practical link. But it's also the case that we can see colours, and the question is, why? The answer is, because we evolved to see ripe fruit. In the story of Adam and Eve, human



beings are given vision by the snake and the fruit, and that turns out to be correct. So isn't that something? And then you think, what role do women play in relationship to men? Well, first, they make them self-conscious. Let's not ever forget about that. I would say that the primary role that women have in relationship to men is to make them self-conscious. Men don't precisely like that, and there's nothing that will make a man more self-conscious than being rejected. Why? Because why is he rejected? Well, mother nature, in the guise of that particular woman, has said that you're not so bad for a friend, but there's no reason that your genetic material should propagate itself into the future.

It's not like men are exactly happy about being made self-conscious by women, right? It's a major source of continual tension between men and women, and it's no wonder. But it's also the case—and this is something really cool, and interesting to know—that we diverged from the common ancestor between us and chimpanzees about six million years ago. Here's why, at least in part: chimpanzee females are non-discriminate maters: they'll mate with any male when they go into heat, which human females don't. When they go into heat, then any male is allowed access. The dominant males chase the subordinate males away, so the dominate males are more likely to leave offspring, but it's not because of a female choice.

That's not the case with human beings. Human females engage in [hypergamy](#). This is also true cross-culturally, and it's just as extensive in Scandinavia—not quite. There's a bit of attenuation, but not much. Women mate across and up dominance hierarchies. Men mate across and down. That has to be the case, because if one goes up, the other has to go down. The socioeconomic status of a woman determines almost zero of her attractiveness towards a man, whereas the socioeconomic status of a man is a major determinant of his attractiveness to a woman—and it isn't his wealth, either; that's been tested; it's his capacity to generate, be productive, and to share. That beats the hell out of wealth. Wealth can disappear, and the capacity to be productive and share is a much more important element. And why not be chosen on the basis of that? Especially because women have to have infants, and infants make the women dependent. The woman is just looking logically, rationally, and from an evolutionary perspective for someone who's useful enough to lend a hand.

Women make intense demands on men, and it's no wonder. But the thing is, because women engaged in hypergamy, we diverged quite rapidly from chimpanzees. The selected pressure that women placed on men developed the entire species. There's two things that happened, as far as I can tell: the men

entire species. There's two things that happened, as far as I can tell. The men competed for competence—so the male hierarchy is a mechanism that pushes the best man to the top, virtually by definition—and then the effect of that is multiplied by the fact that women who are hypergamous peel from the top. The males who are the most competent are much more likely to leave offspring, and that seemed to be what drove our cortical expansion, for example, which happened very, very rapidly over the course of evolutionary time.

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat."

Oh, yes—women share food. That's a very strange thing, because most creatures don't share food. If you're a wolf, and you bring down something in a hunt, you eat your fill. The dominant creatures eat their fill, and if there's some left over, the subordinates get to eat, too. But that isn't how human beings work: we share food. And you can imagine how that evolved: lots of female creatures share food with their offspring—you don't need much of a twist in that, from an evolutionary perspective, until you start to share food with not only your offspring, say, but with your mate. That's another way that you entice a mate. It's like, we're going to be better together than alone. Well, that's the offering of the fruit. What's the self-conscious part? Well, here's part of the bargain: I'm going to wake you up, partly because you need to be woken up, and partly because I have this infant that needs some damn care. So you bloody well better be awake, and part of the bargain is that I'll offer you some food. In response, we're going to make a team, and that's the human deal. That's why we're, more or less, monogamous, and why we, more or less, pair bond, and why something approximating marriage is a human universal. It's cross-cultural.

You can find exceptions, but who the hell cares? Really, who cares? You look at the vast pattern... Well, and the price we pay for having large brains is that we're very dependent, and it takes a long time for us to get programmed. Because of that, we need relatively stable family bonding, and that's basically what we've evolved. You don't get that without making men self-conscious. Male creatures—why not impregnate and run? I mean, why the hell not? Really, no kidding. That's the thing to think about: it is not why men abandon their children that's the mystery: it's why any men ever stick with them. That's the mystery. You just have to look at the animal kingdom. The simplest and easiest thing is always the most likely thing to occur. It's the exception—long-term commitment—that

needs explanation.

"She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of both of them were opened—" implying that before that they were closed "—and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons."

That's so interesting. Their eyes are opened, which indicated that they weren't to begin with. Whatever God created to begin with was kind of blind, but not—blind in some strange way. They weren't wandering around in the garden and bumping into trees. It was some sort of metaphysical blindness that's been removed by whatever has just happened. Whatever's just happened also made them realize that they were naked. Ok, so what sort of eye-opening is that? What does it mean to realize that you're naked? It means to realize that you're vulnerable. That's what people discovered. It's like, uh oh. We can be hurt.

So you're a zebra in a herd of zebras, and there's a bunch of lions around there laying on the grass. You don't care. Those are laying-down lions. Laying-down lions are no problem. It's standing-up, hunting lions that are the problem. You're not smart enough to figure out that laying-down lions turn into standing-up, hunting lions, so you're not, like, building a fort to keep the lions out. You're just mindlessly eating grass. You're not very awake, but that's not what happens to human beings. Human beings wake up, and they think, we're vulnerable—permanently. It's never going away. It's the recognition of that eternal vulnerability.

What happens? The first thing they do is clothe themselves. Well, what happens when you're naked, and when you need protecting from the world? You're all wearing clothes. Why? Well, we've been doing that for a very, very long period of time. It's tens of thousands of years, at minimum. In fact, you can track, more or less, when clothing developed by doing DNA testing on the kind of lice that cling to clothes rather than hair. We have a pretty good idea of when clothing emerged, and of different types, as well. But the point is that they're naked, and they think that's not so good; we're vulnerable. Their eyes are opened enough so that they become self-conscious, and they recognize their own vulnerability. The first thing they do—the first step of culture—is to protect themselves with something from the world. You protect yourself from the world, and from the prying eyes of other people.

This is a book by Lynne Isbell: [Why We See So Well](#). "From the temptation of Eve to the venomous murder of the mighty Thor, the serpent appears throughout time and cultures as a figure of mischief and misery. The worldwide prominence of snakes in religion, myth, and folklore underscores our deep connection to the serpent-but why, when so few of us have firsthand experience? The surprising answer, this book suggests, lies in the singular impact of snakes on primate evolution. Predation pressure from snakes, Lynne Isbell tells us, is ultimately responsible for superior vision and large brains of primates-and for a critical aspect of human evolution."

That was tested recently. Psychologists have known for a long time that people can learn to fear snakes, but they discovered in primates a set of neurons—[Pulvinar neurons](#)—which are specialized. "Pulvinar neurons reveal neurobiological evidence of past selection for rapid detection of snakes." That's from 2013. So the snake definitely woke us up.

Color vision as an adaptation to fruit eating in primates. It's not by accident that women make themselves look like ripe fruit to be attractive to men, right? And that's also not sociocultural in origin. "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden."

That's interesting. What's the implication? Prior to being woken up—prior to recognizing nakedness and vulnerability—there is no reason for man and woman to hide from God. Why are they hiding from God? They're naked and vulnerable. Ok, so think about this—think about this: Imagine that you have the capacity to live truthfully, courageously, and forthrightly. Just imagine that, and then imagine why you might not do that. How about fear and shame? How would that work? Well, let's say that the idea of living forthrightly, truthfully, and courageously is analogous—given what we already know about these stories—to walking with God in the garden. What stops people from doing that? What stops people from hiding? Well, it's their own recognition of their own inadequacies. They look at themselves, and they think, how in the world is a creature such as I, with everything that's wrong with me, supposed to live properly in this world?

What do you hide from? Well, you go home, and you sit on your bed for five minutes and ask yourself what you have hidden from in your life. Man, you'll have books of knowledge reveal themselves to you in your imagination. Well, why are you hiding? It's no bloody wonder you're hiding. It's no wonder that

why are you hiding. It's no bloody wonder you're hiding. It's no wonder that people hide. That's the thing that's so terrifying about this story. We woke up and we thought, oh my God, look at this place. There is some serious trouble here, and we're in some serious trouble, and we're not what we could be. And so we hide, and that's what the story says: people woke up, became self-conscious, recognized their own vulnerability, and that made them hide from manifesting their divine destiny. It's like, yea. That's exactly right.

I love this part of the story. It's so funny, and we could use a little humor at this point. "And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And Adam said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked." So, in case there was any doubt about that, that's why. "And God said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Did you eat of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that you should not eat?" This is where Adam shows himself in all his post-fall, heroic glory: "And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."

So that's man. Again, there's a modern feminist interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve that makes the claim that Eve was portrayed as the universal bad guy of humanity for disobeying God and eating the apple. It's like, fair enough. It looks like she slipped up, and then she tempted her husband, and that makes her even worse—although, he was foolish enough to immediately eat, so it just means that she was a little more courageous than him and got there first.

It's Adam who comes across as really one sad creature in this story, as far as I'm concerned. Look at what he manages in one sentence: First of all, it wasn't him; it was the woman. Second, he even blames God! It wasn't just the woman—and you gave her to me! "And she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." It's like, hey, Adam's all innocent—except now, not only is he naked, disobedient, cowardly, and ashamed, he's also a snivelling, backbiting fink. He rats her out like the second he gets the opportunity, and then he blames God. That's exactly right. You go online, and you read the commentary that men write about women when they're resentful and bitter about women. It's so interesting. It's like, it's not me: it's those bitches. It's not me: it's them—and not only that, but what a bloody world this is in which they exist. It's exactly the same thing. It's exactly the same thing, and it is absolutely pathetic.

"And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." Well, at least she has a bloody excuse. First of all, it's a snake. We already found out that they're subtle.

Second, it turns out that the damn snake is Satan himself, and he's rather treacherous. So the fact that she got tangled up in his mess is, well, problematic, but it's a hell of a lot better excuse than Adam has.

"And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life"—and snakes, by the way, are lizards that lost their legs, just so you know—"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." I love these pictures. They're so smart. And again, strip the religious context from them and just look at them for a second. What do you see? You see the eternal mother holding her infant away from a snake. See it, down there? Crocodile, snake—everything predatory that's been after us for like 60 million years. The reason we're here is because of that. That's why it's a sacred image.

This one I like even better. Down there there's something like the moon, and then there's a reptile down there that Eve's stepping on. This is really old, and I showed you this before, but I think it's so cool. She's coming out of this thing that's like a hole in the sky. It indicates the eternal recurrence of this figure. It's an archetype. The potential out of which she is emerging is all musical instruments, back here. And so what the artist is representing is the great, patterned complexity of being, and the emergence of the protective mother from that background, protecting the infant, eternally, against predation. It's like, how can that not be a holy image? If you don't think it's a holy image, then there isn't something wrong with the image: there's something wrong with the perceiver.

"Unto the woman he said"—God's just outlining the consequences of this, right now. It's like, ok, well, now you've gone and done it: you've woken up. This is what's going to happen—"I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."

It doesn't say he should. It says he will. And why "in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children?" Well, when you develop a brain that big, so that you can see, it's not that easy to give birth anymore. And then you produce something that's dependent beyond belief—that's one of the things that you could say dooms you to precisely this. So that's Eve's punishment for waking up. And Adam, "Because thou hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground

for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life." What's that? It's the invention of work.

"Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field."

It's the invention of work. What do people do that animals don't? Work. What does work mean? It means you sacrifice the present for the future. Why do you do that? Because you know that you're vulnerable, and you're awake. From here on in, from this point, there's no return to unconscious paradise. I don't care how many problems you solved so that today's ok. You've got a lot problems coming up, and no bloody matter how much you work, you're never going to work enough to solve them. All you're going to do from here on in is be terrified of the future, and that's the price of waking up. That's the end of paradise, and that's the beginning of history, and that's how that story goes.

"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living."

"Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them"—that's William Blake, by the way—"And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:"

"Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden [Cherubims](#), and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." One more thing, and then we'll stop.

Adam and Eve are tempted by the snake; they eat the fruit; they wake up; they realize they're naked; they realize that they're vulnerable; they realize the future; they realize they're gonna die; they realize they're gonna have to work; they realize the difficulty in conception, and the fall of humankind from unconscious paradise. Ok. That makes sense. What about the knowledge of good and evil? What in the world does that mean?

The Mesopotamians believed that human beings were made out of the blood of Kingu, who was the worst monster that Tiamat, the Goddess of chaos, could imagine and then produce. So their idea was that there as something deeply, deeply, deeply, demonically flawed about humanity. That's their conception, and it's out of that same milieu that these stories emerge.

So what does opening your eyes and realizing your vulnerability have to do with the knowledge of good and evil? I thought about that. I really thought about that. I gotta tell you, I thought about that for like 20 years, because I knew there was something there that I could not put together. At the same time, I was reading things. I'm going to tell you something truly awful, and so if you need a trigger warning, you're getting one. Believe me, I do not give trigger warnings lightly. I'm going to tell you something you'll never forget.

This is what [Unit 731](#) used to do in China. It's a Japanese unit during the 2nd World War. As far as I can tell, they did the most horrific things that were done to anyone during World War II, and that's really something. So this is what they did: They took their prisoners and put them in a position so that their arms would freeze solid. Then they would take them outside and pour hot water over their arms. And then they would repeat that until the flesh came off the bones. They were doing that to investigate the treatment of frostbite for soldiers. You can look up Unit 731 if you want to have nightmares. So that's Unit 731. That's human beings. Someone thought that up, and then people did it. What's knowledge of good and evil? Here's the key, man: You know you're vulnerable. No other animal knows that. You know what hurts you, and now that you know what hurts you, you can figure out what hurts someone else. And as soon as you know what hurts someone else, and you can use that, you have the knowledge of good and evil.

Well, it's a pretty good trick that the snake pulled, because it doesn't look like it's exactly the sort of thing that we might have wanted if we had known the consequences. But as soon as a human being is self-conscious and aware of his own nakedness, then he has the capacity of evil, and that's introduced into the world right at that point.

Here's the rest of the story: So there's the snake, right, and you're some tree-dwelling primate. The snake eats primates, and that sucks, so let's watch out for the damn snakes. Then your brain grows, and you think, wait a minute. There's not just snakes—there's where snakes live. Why don't we just get the hell out of the tree, hunt down the snakes, and get rid of them? Those are sort of like potential snakes, and so the snake becomes potential snake. It's the same circuit that you're using to do this thinking. You get rid of the damn snakes. It's like Saint Patrick chasing them out of Ireland. No more snakes. Everything is paradise. It's like, no, no, no. That's not how it works, at all.

You've got human snakes. You're a tribe, you've got tribal enemies, and you've



You've got human snakes. You're a tribe, you've got tribal enemies, and you've got to defend yourself against the human snakes, right? Maybe your empire expands, and you get rid of all the human snakes. Then what happens? They start to grow and develop inside. You get rid of all the external enemies and make a big city, and all of a sudden there's enemies that pop up inside.

The snake isn't just the snake in the garden, and the snake isn't just the possible snake, and the snake isn't just the snake that's your enemy. The snake is your friend, because your friend can betray you. And then it's even worse than that, because you can betray you. So even if you get rid of all the outside snakes, you've got an inside snake, and God only knows what it's up to.

That's why the bloody Christians associated the snake in the garden of Eden with Satan. It's unbelievably brilliant, because you gotta think, what's the enemy? Well, it's the snake, and fair enough. But, you know, that's good if you're a tree-dwelling primate. If you're a sophisticated human being with six million years of additional evolution, and you're really trying to solve the problem of what it is that's the great enemy of mankind... Well, it's the human propensity for evil, right? That's the figure of Satan. That's what that figure means—just like there's a logos that's the truth that speaks order out of chaos at the beginning of time, there's an antithetical spirit—the hostile brother. That's Cain to Abel, which we'll talk about next week—that's doing exactly the opposite. It's motivated by absolutely nothing but malevolence and the willingness to destroy, and it has every reason for doing so. That's what's revealed in the next story, in Cain and Abel: the first glimmerings of the antithetical spirit outside of this strange insistence by the Christian mystics, let's say, on the identity between the snake in the garden of Eden and the author of all evil himself.

## V: Cain and Abel: The Hostile Brothers

I'm going to read you something. I get a lot of mail. I don't know where I got this. I've been a lot of different places in the last week, and this showed up at one of them. I'm going to read it to you. I have no idea what to make of it.

It's written in a female hand. That's about all I can tell. There's no address or name on it. "This isn't a question but a comment—or, more accurately, perhaps, a message. I spent this past weekend in an [Ayahuasca](#) ceremony, which, for those of you who don't know, is a South American visionary plant medicine. Some of you may roll your eyes at this, but Ayahuasca brings you into direct contact with the archetypal realm of being. Users of this medicine—initiates, I should say—refer to Ayahuasca as she, because the spirit of the plant is decidedly feminine, and an encounter with Ayahuasca is an encounter with the great mother earth, creation, the goddess, the void from which all things come—the feminine counterpart of logos. Dr. Peterson, you appeared in one of my Ayahuasca visions."

It might account for why I've been rather fatigued lately. "Dr. Peterson, you appeared in one of my Ayahuasca visions, and I asked her, who is Jordan Peterson? What is he doing?" Which is something I'd really like to know, as well. "And she responded with crystalline clarity: he is here to invoke and initiate the divine masculine principle on earth at this time. So, I'm up here to thank you deeply and profoundly on behalf of the great mother herself, the goddess, the divine feminine principle who has been eagerly awaiting the awakening of the masculine principle into divinity and service."

So...You don't get a letter like that every day. Actually, I get a letter or two like that every day. What went through my head when I read this—and this is, of course, a completely crazy parallel, but one of the things I learned to do as a psychotherapist was just to tell people who were talking to me what came into my head. It isn't what I'm thinking, exactly. That's not exactly the same thing. What comes into your head is more like a dream. It comes unbidden. It's like your imagination. If you're thinking, there seems to be a voluntary element of that, right? I mean, God only knows how we think, but it seems partly voluntary, at least.

Jung thought about it like a dialog between the conscious mind and the unconscious mind. There is a continual dialog. But when things just pop into

unconscious mind. There as a continual dialog. But when things just pop into your mind, it's not much different than walking into a room and having something there, which is an observation I also derived from Jung, by the way. He pointed out, quite rightly, that people don't really think, but that thoughts appear to them. Now you can take the thoughts that appear to you, and then you can subject them to criticism, elaboration, and so on, instead of just assuming that they're true right off the bat. But people often don't do that; something pops into their head and they assume that it's true.

Anyways, one of the things that I tend to do in psychotherapy is to just tell people what pops into my head. Why? Because then the person that is talking to me gets one person's untrammelled opinion. Not even that—reaction. Not opinion. It's not really an opinion, I don't think. An opinion, maybe, is what I think later. There's this personal flavour to it.

What popped into my head was the story about Socrates. When he was being put on trial by the Athenians for corrupting the nation's youth—something I've been accused of, by the way, although it's not self-evident to me that it's me doing the corrupting. Somebody had asked the [Delphic Oracle](#), once—and the Delphic Oracle was this retreat you could go to if you were an ancient Greek citizen. You'd be there, and you'd have a dream, and then you'd go ask the Delphic Oracle to interpret it. Nobody really knows what was up with the Delphic Oracle, and how that worked, exactly. She would interpret your dream, in any case.

Somebody once asked her who the wisest man in Greece was. The Delphic Oracle said it was Socrates, because he knew he didn't know anything. That's essentially the story. That popped into my mind. It's a crazy comparison, but I have a crazy mind, so I guess that's how it works out.

Now, one of the things I'm going to do today—which I haven't done before—is to read you a little bit of my book that I finished last week. I haven't read it to anyone. I've given it to a couple of friends, to review. One person in particular, a screen writer named [Gregg Hurwitz](#), has been unbelievable helpful. He's so fast and sharp at this sort of thing. I can send him a dense, 20-page manuscript, and he'll rip it to shreds and send it back to me in like 90 minutes. It's just unbelievable. He's so good at that. He's been very helpful. But no one else has seen it apart from my editor, and I haven't read it to anyone. But some of it seemed particularly appropriate for tonight's lecture.

So I thought I would start the lecture tonight by reading a little bit of it. It's from a chapter on the issue of sacrifice as such. This is Abraham and Isaac. This is a very strange, little Old Testament story. This is one of the stories that's contained in the Old Testament that makes modern people think that maybe we should just not have that much to do with the Old Testament, per say, at all, especially with regards—and maybe we shouldn't have anything to do with the God of the Old Testament, either. I mean, as far as Abraham is concerned, God tells him to sacrifice his own son. Now it turns out that God was just kidding, so to speak. I'm obviously being flippant, but it does raise the question, what do you make of the divine being who would require such a thing? Or, conversely, what do you make of Abraham, who would have such delusions? Either way, it's a little hard on the modern believability, and on the moral integrity of the Old Testament. These are very, very strange stories, and they are not what they seem to be—or they are, and they're more.

So we're going to talk a lot about sacrifice tonight. Here's some of the things that I've been thinking about sacrifice. This is from my book, called [12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos](#). It's coming out in January, which I think I mentioned. This is from Rule 7, which is Pursue What is Meaningful, Not What Is Expedient.

And so here's some of the writing that I've been doing over the last three years on the motif of sacrifice. I'll start with just a brief intro before I read this. It took me a long time to understand what was meant in the Old Testament by sacrifice, which is strange. Once I figured it out, it seemed bloody obvious. It seemed like, oh, well, obviously that's what it means. But lots of times if you figure something out correctly, it seems self-evident as soon as you figured it out correctly. We'll see how that goes, but it seemed to work for me, anyways.

I knew, at least implicitly, of the modern usage of the idea of sacrifice. Everyone understands that motif. It's that, if you want to make things better in the future, then you make sacrifices in the present. Maybe you even do that multi-generationally—in fact, you most definitely do if you're a good parent. I would say that's particularly typical of immigrants, right? Immigrants often come from terrible places, and they have to undergo terrible things to come to a new community where they get a rough reception. They have a hard time getting their life going. A big part of the reason that they do it is to make their lives, and the lives of their children, better. Luckily, when they come to Canada—usually, given where they came from—that actually works. Where they came from is worse, and here is better, even though, you know, immigrants often have to

struggle to get on their feet again. They have to learn a new language, become inculturated, and face the fact that they're not part of the mainstream culture. But many of you know that whole story.

So the idea that you make sacrifices for the future, and that you make sacrifices for your children—everyone understands that. It's part of being responsible, mature, and shouldering the burden of being properly. You do that for yourself, too, if you're disciplined. In fact, that's almost what disciplined means. Disciplined means that you're capable of making sacrifices. You're not disciplined if you just do something you want more, rather than something that you're doing. That's not discipline. Maybe that works, and great. If your life is working out that way, great, man, but that isn't discipline. Discipline is when you want to do something right now and instead you think, no, I'm going to forestall my gratification, maybe forever, but certainly for a medium to a long period of time. You concentrate on something that you think will bear fruit in the medium to long run. You look into the future, and you decide that, by making today a little less impulsively pleasurable, shall we say, you'll make tomorrow a little bit more secure and productive. And then you actually do it, too. That's difficult.

Last week we discussed Adam and Eve's discovery of the future and the revelation of the possibility of the future, including the possibility of tragedy and suffering in the future. It's our knowledge of the possibility of tragedy and suffering in the future that motivates us to sacrifice in the present, so that we can reduce the unnecessary anxiety, uncertainty, and pain that awaits us. Now, that's a negative way of putting it. We're also doing it so that we can have some joy, and so that we can make life better, and all of that. That's not trivial. But the fundamental issue, especially once you have small children, is to stave the suffering the hell off, right? That's what you want to do. That's your primary moral obligation if you're a person who has any—if your eyes are open, at all, that's your primary obligation. And so you make the sacrifices that are necessary, and you set up the future.

The motif of sacrifice is there in the Old Testament, but it's so concrete that it's difficult to draw a parallel between the two of these. For me, they didn't align self-evidently. I went to the United Church until I was about 13. I don't ever remember anybody pointing out the sacrifices that Cain and Abel were making, or the sacrifice that Abraham was supposed to make, or that the sacrifices that people were making to God were the dramatic precursors to the psychological

idea of sacrifice that we all hold as civilized people in the modern world. Although, it seems obvious—as I said—once you lay it out. I don't remember that ever being explained to me. Let me read this, now that I've sort of introduced it.

"Here's what happened as humanity developed. First were the endless tens or hundreds of thousands of years prior to the emergence of written history and drama. The twin practices of delay and exchange began to emerge, slowly and painfully."

So here's a cool psychological study. It's called the [Marshmallow Test](#), and maybe it's even a reliable study, even though it was done by social psychologists. It's probably replicable. It's a nice study. You take small children, and you bring them into a room, and you put something that they would like in front of them—a marshmallow—and then you torture them. You say, see that marshmallow? And the kid thinks, yea, I see that marshmallow. You can have that marshmallow right now or, if you wait—I think the experiment is 10 minutes—then you can have two marshmallows. And so that puts the child in quite the conundrum. They are being asked to trade an actual, concrete, tangible marshmallow for two hypothetical, future marshmallows.

It's not that easy to conjure up a hypothetical future reality that has the same tangible significance as something real right in front of you. It's an amazing thing that people can do that. Then the experimenter leaves. Some children grab the marshmallow and just chomp that thing down, right now. Other kids—they videotaped kids. While they're away, the kids do all sorts of things. They whistle, and they look at the ceiling, and they sit on their hands. They try to distract themselves. Of course, they're eyeing that marshmallow like a squirrel eyeing a nut, and they're trying to restrain themselves. What I see in that is that child's prefrontal cortex. The higher cortical systems are warring with the underlying motivational systems—more primordial motivational systems that govern such things as hunger. The hunger system, the [hypothalamic](#) system, says there's something sweet and fat sitting right there, right bloody now. Grab that thing and stuff it down—now. I'm sure many of you have a constant battle with your hypothalamus in regards to sweet and fat things, and often lose, so you can feel some sympathy for the child. The hypothalamus has these tremendously powerful tendrils upward into the brain, into the parts that we would associate more with voluntary control. The voluntary control centers have these little, weak ribbons going down to control the hypothalamus. It's pretty obvious, if you

know something about neuroanatomy, what part is actually in charge when the chips are down.

It's not easy for children to learn to regulate those underlying, primordial impulses—the ones that are wired in, and that we share with animals. But they do it, and the cool thing is—this is what [Walter Mischel](#) found. He's the guy that did the study. The longterm outcome for the children who could delay gratification in the Marshmallow Test is much more positive than it is for the children that are impulsive and eat the marshmallow instantly. It's delay of gratification. It's likely that that's associated with trait conscientiousness, although that specific connection has not yet been established. But they seem, conceptually, very, very similar.

Anyways, this emerges in children probably between the ages of two and four. Something like that. They should have it in place by four, because it's very difficult for them to really interact well with other children without having that delay of gratification in place. If you can't delay gratification, other kids don't like you, because you want everything your way, and you want it now, and you're liable to have a temper tantrum, and that sort of thing. You haven't got the kind of self-control necessary to make you fun to play with. So you can see that emerging in children, and it's pretty interesting. Not only that, but as it emerges, it predicts positive, longterm outcomes—just like trait conscientiousness does, by the way. Trait conscientiousness is the 2nd best predictor of longterm success, over the lifespan, in Western cultures. It's 2nd after intelligence. In our societies, the people who do best across time are the people who have high IQs and work hard. I would say that's a pretty decent... What would you call it...It's a validation, in some sense, that our cultures are working properly. What you would want, I would say—if the system is working meritocratically, like it should, and if you're trying to extract resources from those who can contribute at a higher rate—is for the hard-working, smart people to do better. Hopefully, if that's the case, then everyone does better. Hopefully. Anyways, you can see this developing in children.

"First were the endless tens or hundreds of thousands of years prior to the emergence of written history and drama. The twin practices of delay and exchange began to emerge, slowly and painfully. Then they became represented, in metaphorical abstraction, as rituals and tales of sacrifice. It's as if there's a powerful figure in the Sky, who's judging you. You better keep them happy, or look the hell out. We've been watching ourselves deal with Him for a long time.

He seems to like it when you give up something you value. So practice sharing and sacrificing, until you get good at it." "No one actually said any of this"—so long ago, although they said something very similar—"But it was implicit in the practice, and then in the stories. Action comes first. Implicit comes first. People watched the successful succeed and the unsuccessful fail for thousands and thousands of years. We thought it over, and drew a conclusion: The successful among us sacrifice. The successful among us delay gratification. The successful among us bargain with the future. A great idea begins to emerge in ever-more articulated form. That idea is the point of a long and profound story. It's the moral of the story." I'm going to engage in some foreshadowing, here. "What's the difference between the successful and the unsuccessful? The successful sacrifice, and things get better as the successful practice their sacrifices. The question becomes increasingly precise and, simultaneously, broader. What is the greatest possible sacrifice, for the greatest possible good?"

If you push a question in that direction, perhaps there comes a time when you can't formulate it any more precisely and broadly. That's the point at which the question, in some sense, and, perhaps, even the answer to the question, becomes archetypal. It comes archetypal, because it can't be bested. This is like an ultimate question, in some sense. How are you going to ask a more broad-based question than that? Given the initial presuppositions—that you have to make sacrifices—then the logical end point to that is something like, ok, if you have to make a sacrifice, what's the greatest possible sacrifice, and for the greatest possible good? That's a good question.

"The answer becomes increasingly profound. The God of Western tradition, like so many gods, requires sacrifice. We've already examined why. But sometimes He goes even further, and requires the sacrifice of what is loved best. This is why, and this is another one of mankind's fundamental discoveries: Sometimes, things do not go well. That's self-evident. But here's the rub: Sometimes, when things are not going well, it's precisely that which is most valued that is the cause." "Why? It's because the world is revealed through the template of your values. If the world you are seeing is not the world you want, therefore, it's time to examine your values. It's time to rid yourself of your current presuppositions."

There's a famous experiment that I've alluded to, a couple of times, I believe, in this lecture series: [the Invisible Gorilla experiment](#). In the Invisible Gorilla experiment, there's two teams of players, each with three members. One team is



dressed in the black, and the other team is dressed in white. Each team is passing a basketball back and forth to the team members, and milling about. You see a video of them doing so. They basically fill the video screen. The white team is passing a basketball to the white team members, and the black team is passing a basketball to the black team members. Your job, as far as the experimenter is concerned, is for you to count the number of times the black team passes the basketball back and forth. That's what you do. Now, you have an ambition, an aim, and a value. The ambition, and the aim, and the value are all the same thing, and that is to perform well at the task. Now, the thing that's so cool about this—and this is really so cool. It's just unbelievable that this is the case. It's like a complete validation of a certain element of the Buddhist worldview.

So, they pass the ball for a couple minutes, then the experimenter says to you, how many, and you say 15, and you're happy with yourself, because you've been paying attention. The experimenter says, yea, that's right—or maybe not; maybe you missed one. And then the experimenter says, did you see the gorilla? And half of you say, what gorilla? Like, really? And the experimenter says, yes. He rewinds the video and replays it, and like a minute and a half into the three minute video, sure enough, in walks this guy in a gorilla suit, six foot three, or so. He stands in the middle of the game—right in the middle of the game—the same size as the players. Perfectly, obviously, evident. He beats his chest for like a second and a half, and then sort of saunters off.

Half the people who watch the video don't see the gorilla, which is absolutely shocking. What that means is that your ambitions blind you to the nature of reality. Now, they illuminate some reality, but they blind you to most of it. That's fine, because you're not—there's not a lot of you, in some sense. You're a very pinpoint thing, like a laser beam, and so you just can't be attending to everything, all the time. If you're suffering dreadfully, then one possibility is that you're so fixed on the point that your fixation might be integrally related to why things are going so catastrophically wrong. Now, perhaps not, because there's a lot of arbitrariness about life. And perhaps you suffer even when you don't deserve to. That seems to happen in the book of Job, for example. Job is a good guy, and God has a bet with Satan—which seems like another relatively nasty thing to do—to, let's say, torture him. Satan does, quite nicely, to see if Job will turn against God. It seems like a rather playground sort of thing for God to engage in, but the point is that, even in a document like the Old Testament, there's ample suggestion that, sometimes, people just get wiped out, and hurt, even if they're living good, moral lives, aiming properly, and all that. There's an

arbitrariness in life. But it's possible that it's what you're clinging to that's hurting you. It's even possible that the thing that you're clinging to the hardest, that's hurting the most, could easily be someone you love.

Lots of times I see people in therapy, and they're miserable for one reason, or another. Sometimes, it's because a very close relationship with a family member just isn't working. The family member, for the sake of simplicity, we'll say, is not really oriented towards helping them have a good life. The family member is, instead, oriented towards making them as bloody miserable as you can possibly make anyone, and exploiting the bond between family members in order to enable that. And then, sometimes, the sacrifice that's necessary is either merely distancing yourself from that person, sometimes substantively, and sometimes seriously distancing yourself from them, like we don't talk anymore, ever. So that's pretty damn rough, and it hurts, and all of that, but it's a good example of the fact that, sometimes, in order to extract yourself from the miserable bit of chaos that you happen to be enmeshed in, you have to let go of what you love best.

"If the world you are seeing is not the world you want, therefore, it's time to examine your values." That's really worth thinking about, because the alternative is to curse fate. If it isn't you, and there's nothing you can do to change, there isn't something you're doing that's wrong, then it's fate itself. It's the world itself. It's other people, let's say, because they're a huge part of the world. Or, it's the nature of the world itself. Or, it's God himself, in whatever form you either believe in, or don't believe in, because it's fundamentally all the same in this sort of situation that I'm describing. One of the things that's really interesting—and I mentioned this before, about the Israelites in the Old Testament—is that they got this right. It's really something.

What happens to the Israelites, over and over in the Old Testament, is they get all puffed up about how wonderful they are, and then they make moral errors. They're arrogant, and then God comes along, and just cuts them into pieces, for like generation after generation. They wobble back to their feet, but they always maintain the same attitude, which is, we did something wrong. We did something wrong. It's like an axiom, rather than an observation: if things are not laying themselves out for us, as they should be, then we cannot curse God; we have to look to ourselves. And you think, well, why not curse God? Because maybe it's his fault. That's a really good question. One of the things that I've tried to figure out over the last 30 years is, well, why not just curse God? Because there is this arbitrary element to existence, and we are vulnerable, and

there is plenty of suffering, and things are unfair. There's problems, right? There's injustice, and there's unfairness, and all of these things, and endless suffering. Why not just lay it at the feet of God? Whether God exists, or not, with regards to the metaphysics of this particular discussion, is not relevant. The point remains the same, either way. The answer, as far as I can tell, is that, if you refuse to take on the responsibility yourself, and you attempt to lay it at the feet of either society, or being itself, then you instantly start to act in a way that makes everything much worse—not only for you, but for everyone else, and maybe even for being itself. It's not helpful.

Now, if you decide that it's you, that you've got the problem—maybe that's not even true. Maybe you are someone who's been tortured by the bet between God and Satan, and too bad for you if that happens to be the case. But it still seems to be the appropriate thing for a human being, who's standing on his or her own two feet in a proper manner, to take the responsibility on for themselves, regardless of the counterarguments that might be made against it. That's really something.

"It's time to rid yourself of your current presuppositions." I also think of that as a deadwood issue. One of the things you see with motifs like the phoenix—remember when Harry Potter goes off to fight? He's like Saint George. He goes off to fight...The hell is that thing...The basilisk that turns you to stone when you look at it. It's a dragon, for all intents and purposes. It's guarding a virgin. What's her name...It's not Virginia. It's close to that, though. Ginny? Ginevera, which is a variant of virgin, and a variant of Virginia. Well, when he gets bitten by the dragon, and poisoned—that's the dragon of chaos, right? The thing that turns you to stone when you look at it. When he gets bitten by it, and he's going to die—and, yea, well, if you get bitten by the thing that turns you to stone when you look at it...Man, if you're not dead, you're gonna wish you are. It's one of the two.

And then the phoenix flies in, and cries tears into the wound, and that heals him. The phoenix is the thing that allows the deadwood to burn off, occasionally, let's say. Well, I think it's once every 100 years with the phoenix, and, of course, it's pretty dramatic. The whole damn bird has to go up in flames, and then there's nothing left but an egg. But there's a very serious message there, too, which is that you can compare yourself, in some sense, to a forest. A forest has to burn, now and then, for the deadwood to clear—so that the forest can actually maintain, and continue its existence. If you stop the forest from burning for a long period of time—which happened in the United States when there were

long period of time—which happened in the United States when they were trying to manage the forest fires too tightly—then all that happens is the deadwood accumulates, and accumulates, and accumulates, and accumulates, and accumulates, until the whole damn forest is deadwood. And then lightning hits it, and it burns so hot that it burns the tops off. And then there's nothing left. Nothing grows. That's a good moral lesson, which is, don't wait too long to let the damn deadwood burn off. Maybe a little self-immolation on a daily basis might be preferable to burning yourself all the way down to the bedrock once every 20 years, or so, because maybe there won't be anything left of you when you do that.

That happens to people all the time. I've seen that happen to people many, many times. The deadwood accumulates, the mess around them gathers, the chaos that they haven't dealt with accumulates. One day the spark comes, and they burn so far, and so fast, that there's not enough left of them to recover. And then they're the people who've been eaten by the dragon, and now are inside its belly—another very common archetypal motif. Well, maybe a hero will come along and rescue them, or maybe they'll just stay in there forever. That's a precursor to the idea of hell. It's not something I would recommend. So, a little medicine on a regular basis is a lot better than total immolation on terms other than your own, sporadically.

"It's time to rid yourself of your current presuppositions." There's another thing that...When Solzhenitsyn wrote about the Soviet Union and its pathologies—it sort of peaked in terms of its pathological authoritarianism when it became illegal to complain that your life wasn't going well. You just think about how horrible that is, say, because, you know, lots of times your life isn't going well, and I don't mean this in some casual way. I mean, maybe you have diabetes, and maybe you're going to lose your feet, or something. It's really nothing trivial that's going on here; something is not good. Or maybe it's economic, or maybe you're unemployed. But, you see, the idea in the Soviet Union was, well, we already have all the answers. Everything's perfect, already. That's what totalitarians think. Well, if everything's perfect, and you're suffering, then, well, maybe there's something wrong with you. Everything is perfect, after all. If you're suffering, what are you going to do? Come out and say you're suffering? Well, then you're evidence that things aren't perfect. You're like a widower, or an orphan, in an Old Testament story. When the kings got too high and mighty, then they wouldn't pay enough attention to the widows and orphans. Then a prophet would come along and say, you know, those widows and orphans are far more important than you think they are, and if you don't pay attention to them

properly, then things are going to fall apart around you in a way that you just can't even imagine. Well, then you're sort of like your own widow, and your own orphan, but you don't get to say, hey, look, things aren't perfect yet, because I'm still having quite a rough time, here. You don't get to admit to your own suffering. If you can't admit to your own suffering, then you certainly—the suffering, especially the excess suffering, should be treated as evidence that you're not doing something quite right, yet. It should be treated as evidence that you're wrong. There's something important, that you're doing, that's wrong. I understand how harsh that is, and I'm not saying that everyone who's suffering is suffering because they're doing something in some simple way that's wrong.

I was in an elevator, once, in a hospital. It's a very terrifying thing. This person got on, who was just in an absolutely state of shock. It was really not good. I don't remember how this happened, but I engaged the person in conversation. They said that they'd just been diagnosed with, what looked to be, terminal cancer. What was horrifying about it was that they were going over their life in the elevator, and trying to figure out what they had done to deserve such a fate. They'd immediately taken it upon themselves as a moral failing. That's not what I'm saying. You can't come up to someone who has cancer and say, well, if you weren't such a bloody idiot throughout your whole life, you wouldn't have cancer. Believe me, that happens a lot more than you think. People who have disease like that get blamed for it. That's not what I'm saying. It's not like that. It's a more generalized attitude that if life isn't yet what it should be, then you have a primary responsibility to do something about it. The place to start looking is to your own errors, and to fix them. That's a safe bet, man, because you're probably doing some things that you wouldn't have to be doing, that, if you fixed, would make things better. "It's time to let go, and to sacrifice who you are for who you could become."

In case any of you are interested in how to catch a monkey, now you're gonna know how to do it. First, you have to take a large, narrow-necked jar, just large enough in diameter at the top for a monkey to put its hand inside. Then you have to fill it part way with rocks, so it is too heavy for the monkey to carry. Then you scatter some treats near the jar, to attract them, and you put some inside the narrow-necked jar. A monkey will come along, if you're lucky, and grab the goodies. He'll want the ones inside the jar, too, so he'll put his hand in there, and grab what's in there. If you've set up your monkey trap properly, then he won't be able to get his hand out, because he's got the goodies. Now, without unclenching his hand, without relinquishing what he already has, the monkey

catcher can just walk over and pick up the monkey. The monkey isn't into the whole sacrifice thing. He's just a monkey. And so you can catch him as a consequence of his own unregulated, hypothalamic desires. To be...what would you say...charitable to the monkey—if you put out candy or something like that, it's like, how often does a monkey get candy? He's probably a little bit more motivated than you are to not let go. But you get the point. The monkey catcher can just walk over to the jar and pick up the monkey. The animal will not sacrifice the part for the whole. That's actually a pretty good phrase, eh? It's the animal that will not sacrifice the part for the whole. Perhaps this story is apocryphal, but as an eccentric psychology professor once told me, fiction lies to you in the most truthful possible manner. "Something valuable, given up, ensures future prosperity. Something valuable, sacrificed, pleases the Lord." Those are equivalent statements. One's more articulated; I would say that's the first statement. The second one is more dramatic, and more embedded in a collective religious dream, you might say. What's most valuable and best sacrificed? Well, obviously, that depends on the culture and the time. What is, at least, emblematic of that? A choice cut of meat. Well, if you're a herdsman, for example, that's a big deal. Generally speaking, throughout human history, meat has been a very valuable commodity—as it is, by the way, among chimpanzees. Chimpanzees hunt. They like to hunt colobus monkeys. They'll basically start eating the damn monkey alive—they weigh about 40 pounds—despite the fact that the thing is screaming away. That's pretty interesting. One of the things it indicates is that male chimps—the ones that do the hunting—aren't really inhibited that much when they're in hunter mode, by what you might describe as empathy. There's certain elements of human behaviour that are reminiscent of that. You see that sort of thing emerge now and then in human battlefields, when groups of men seem to abandon all internal regulation, whatsoever, to a degree that makes you wonder if internal regulation even exists.

There's a good book by [Richard Wrangham](#), I think, about the human invention of fire. I think I've told you a little bit about this. Wrangham claimed that we discovered fire, mastered it, maybe two or three million years ago. That's a long time—longer than people had thought—and that's what actually transformed us, physiologically, from our chimp-like ancestors into the svelte creatures we are, now. It's a lot easier to digest cooked meat, and meat is a tremendous source of nutrition, energy, raw materials, all of that, especially if it's cooked. So, meat's a big deal. Cooked meat is a big deal, and maybe it's a choice cut of meat—the kind you might offer to a guest if you're not...I always say this wrong. Is it vegan? Vegan? Or is it vegan? I always think vegan, but that's wrong. That's a

star. Vega's a star, right? They're not like star creatures. Anyways, you might offer that, especially if a guest came to your abode, and you were a herdsman. You might sacrifice a high-end animal, and offer your guest a nice choice cut of meat. That would actually matter. It would mean something—from the best animal in a flock.

What's above even that? Well, in terms of the thing you could sacrifice, well, your best animals is good. Well, how about you? How about your child? Well, that would be next on the hierarchy. It's kind hard to get past that, right? I think it's a tossup, whether the sacrifice is greater if it's you, or if it's your child. I would say, being a parent, that it's greater if it's your child. I think most people who have established...I hesitate to say proper, but I'm going to, anyways...a proper relationship with their children...If push came to shove, they'd take the bullet; and let their kid go and live.

The sacrifice of the mother is exemplified, profoundly, by Michelangelo's great sculpture, [the Pieta](#). Mary is contemplating her son crucified and ruined. That's his body, after he's been crucified. It's her fault. It was through her he had entered the great drama of being. So, what's the meaning of this sculpture? It's a great sculpture. It's just an absolutely unbelievable sculpture. You just can't believe that someone could exist who could make something like that. It wasn't the only thing Michelangelo made, right? It wasn't like, that's it. It was something that he just tossed off in a couple of months while he was doing other, unbelievable things. It's an object of contemplation, which is why it's in a great cathedral, and in a great city. It's an object of contemplation. The idea is something like, well, what's the role of the mother if she's awake?

I had a client come to see me not very long ago: a woman, who's about 30, trying to make decisions about her life. She was pretty career-oriented, and so I asked her about—although, maybe having a bit of trouble with her career. I've seen this many, many times. This is a story that's an amalgam. I talked to her about the other elements of her life. You only do five things in life. So, you've got your career down. What do you do outside of your career that's meaningful and engaging? How are things going with your family? Do you have an intimate relationship? And what's your plan for your own family? And apart from those five things, there's sort of something like, get some exercise, now and then, don't eat too badly, and try to stay away from the drugs. That kinda lays out life. If you miss any of those five things, or if you do any of those other things wrong, then you're in trouble. You can get away with missing a couple of them, but not all of them. She said something along the lines of, well, I'm not sure if I

but not all of them. She said something along the lines of, well, I'm not sure if I should bring a child into this world. I thought, oh, God. Christ. You gotta come up with something better than that! It's such a bloody cliché, which is what I told her. I said, you must have thought that up when you were 16. It's like, really? You can't do any better? This was a very, very smart woman. It's like, really, you can't do any better than that? Yes, obviously this is a veil of tears, and a well of suffering, and all of that. If you ask 30 people who are wondering about having children why they're wondering, 20 of them will say that. That tells you how original it is. It's not original, at all. It's not a thought. It's a meme; something that lives in your mind. It's not a thought. It's certainly not something that you should just take at face value and say, well, I'm not having a family. No, you kinda look at that, and you criticize it a little bit.

That's the other one that's very common: there's too many people on the planet already. I really don't like that statement. It's like, just who are you gonna ask to leave? Just how are you going to get them to leave? It's a serious question. And who says there's too many people? What the hell's wrong with people, anyways? We're running around, and ruining the planet. Yea...I think it was the [Club of Rome](#) who prophesied, by the way, that there would be so many people on the planet by the year 2,000 that there would be widespread starvation. They were completely and utterly wrong about that. I think it was the Club of Rome who compared us to either a virus or a cancer on the face of the planet. It's like, oh, really? That's what you think about people, eh? Hm, aren't you something? Isn't that something to think about human beings—viruses and cancer. What do you do with viruses and cancer? Invite them in, and make them at home? It's like, no. You try to eradicate them. You bloody well better watch your metaphors, folks, because it isn't clear if you come up with them, or if they run you, so you better watch them.

So, anyways. Mary's the Great Mother. She's the Mother. That's what Mary is. Whether she existed or not is not the point. She exists, at least, as a hyper-reality. She exists as the Mother. What's the sacrifice of the Mother? Well, that's easy. If you're a mother who's worth her salt, you offer your son to be destroyed by the world. That's what you do. That's what's going to happen, right? He's going to be born; he's going to suffer; he's going to have his trouble in life; he's going to have his illnesses; he's going to face his failures and catastrophes, and he's going to die. That's what's going to happen. If you're awake, you know that, and then you say, well, perhaps he will live in a way that will justify that. And then you try to have that happen. That's what makes you worthy of a statue like that.



Bestow the sacrifice of the Mother. Is it right to bring a baby into this terrible world? Well, every woman asks herself that question. Some say, no, and they have their reasons. Mary answers yes, voluntarily. Mary is the archetype of the woman who answers yes to life, voluntarily. That's what that image means, and not because she's blind. She knows what's going to happen. She's the archetypal representation of the woman who says yes to life, knowing full well what life is. Not naive, and not someone who got pregnant in the back seat of a 1957 Chevy, in one night of half drunk idiocy. Not that, but consciously, knowing what's to come—and then, also, allows it to happen. That's another thing that's a testament to the courage of mothers.

My mother was good at this. My mother's a very agreeable person—too agreeable for her own good, but that's what happens if you're agreeable. That's the definition of agreeable. She's a nice person—and still is, luckily. She's still alive, and we've had a really good relationship. I've always been able to make her laugh, which is a good thing. But she was a tough cookie, that woman. I was out playing in this little baseball diamond, in an empty lot, in this little town I grew up in. I was about 10. She walked by. I was there with a bunch of my friends. I was about to have a fistfight with this little tough kid that I hung around with. There were half girls on the team, and a fistfight had some relationship to status maneuvering in relationship to that. Anyways, we were going to have a fight. My mom walked by. She took a look, and I could see from her demeanour that she knew exactly what was about to happen. She looked for a second, and then she walked by. And I thought, whoa! Good work, mom! No kidding, eh? The last bloody thing I needed at that moment was for her to come charging up, and say, you boys aren't planning to have a fight, are you? It's like, well, yea, mom. We're actually planning to have a fight, and now that you came and intervened, I actually lost before the goddamn thing even started. So two thumbs up for mom. She was also the person that said—I had some trouble with my dad when I was an adolescent. He had some trouble with me. It was 50-50—no, it was probably 70-30, with me on the 70 end of the trouble. Anyways, I left home when I was about 17. She said something really interesting when I left home. She said, if it was too good at home, you'd never leave. I thought, hey, mom, that's pretty good. For an agreeable person, you've got a real spine. That was pretty good.

The mother is the person who also says, get out there and take your goddamn lumps, because you're tough enough so that you can handle it. She doesn't say, just stay down there in your bedroom, brooding away, because the world is

unfair and treating you badly, and your suffering is too much. She says, yea, there's a lot of suffering out there, but you're a hell of a lot tougher than you think you are.

"In turn Mary's son, Christ, offers Himself to God so completely that his faith and trust in the world is not broken by betrayal, torture, or death. That's the model for the honorable man." You have an interesting dynamic, there. You have the woman who's willing to make the sacrifice, and who lays the groundwork for the son, who is willing to make the sacrifice. That works out pretty nicely. It's a good thing to know. "In Christ's case, however—as He sacrifices Himself—God, his Father, is simultaneously sacrificing his Son." That's one of the oddities of the Trinitarian model, is that God sacrifices himself to himself. The same thing happens in Norse mythology...German mythology. Zeus sacrifices himself to himself. He actually hangs on a tree. He's actually wounded in his side. It's a very interesting parallel. But I think part of the idea is the human race is trying to work out, what's the ultimate sacrifice? It's something like the ultimate sacrifice of value. Well, the Passion story—and I told you I was foreshadowing. I'm bringing into consideration things that we won't talk about for a long time, and maybe not at all in this lecture series, because I don't know how far I'll get. There's a supreme sacrifice demanded on the part of the mother, and there's a supreme sacrifice demanded on the part of the son, and there's a supreme sacrifice demanded on the part of the father, all at the same time. That makes the supreme sacrifice possible, and, hypothetically, that's the one that renews. That's the sacrifice that renews and redeems. It's a hell of an idea. The thing about it is that—I don't know if it's true, but I know that its opposite is false.

Generally, the opposite of something that's false is true. Its opposite is false, because if the mother doesn't make the sacrifice, then you get the horrible Oedipal situation, or something like that, in the household, which is its own absolutely catastrophic hell. If you want a really good insight into that, watch the documentary [Crumb](#). That's been rated by some critics as the best documentary ever made. It is some piece of work, man. It is the only thing I've ever seen that actually lays out the Oedipal catastrophe in its full nightmare. So you could look at that. If the maternal sacrifice isn't there, that doesn't work. If the paternal sacrifice isn't there, if the father isn't willing to put his son out into the world, let's say, to be broken and betrayed, and all of those things, then that's a nonstarter, because the kid doesn't grow up. And then, if the son isn't willing to do that, then who the hell is going to shoulder the responsibility? If those three

things don't happen, then it's cataclysmic; it's chaotic; it's hell. If they do happen, is it the opposite of that? You could say, well, maybe it depends on the degree to which they happen. It's a continuum. How thoroughly can they happen? Well, we don't know. You might say, how good a job do you do of encouraging your children to live in truth? That's part of the answer to this question. The answer likely is, you don't do as good a job of it as you could. It works out quite well, but you don't know how well it could work if you did it really well, or spectacularly well, or ultimately well, or something like that. You don't know.

People have an intimation of this. One of the things that's really cool about having a young baby...There's two things you don't know...There's a lot more than two. There's three things you don't know until you have a baby. The one is that you didn't grow up yet. You actually don't grow up until someone else is more important than you. You can't. People think they grow up if they don't have children, but they don't. They just think they do. Now, there are some people who make sacrifices of other sorts, but this is a whole different ball of wax, as far as I'm concerned. It's not a very elegant metaphor, but...You learn that it's kinda a relief not to be the center of attention. That's cool—that you can sit back, because, of course, your child, in your family, and in society, is immediately the center of attention. Unless you're narcissistic, then you allow that to happen. And then you learn all sorts of really good things about other people.

Other people really like babies. It's so cool. I lived in Montreal when we had our first child. I lived in a pretty rough neighbourhood, by Montreal standards. It's like, Montreal's such a great city, like Toronto. Even the rough neighbourhoods are more like charming with a little dark underbelly. Something like that. But there were some rough characters in our neighbourhood, and it was pretty poor, and we'd push her around in her stroller. These grizzled, wrecked, old guys would come by, look at her, and just light up. They'd come over and smile at her, and you just saw the positive element of their humanity well worth. There has to be something seriously wrong with you if you don't respond that way to a baby. That's not good. But it was so cool to see these people, who you'd generally kind of walk around on the street, and, all of a sudden, the layers that were on them would just fall off. The babies are sort of like public property, weirdly enough, too—sort of like pregnant women. People often treat pregnant women sort of like they're public property, too—in a positive way. They do all sorts of cute things.

The reason I'm telling you that is because there's a strong impulse in people to know that there's something miraculous about the existence of a new human being. The miraculous element is all the potential that's there. Potential is all that is there. With every birth, there's the potential for something remarkable to be introduced in the world. One of the things I've thought, too, is that babies are generic until you have one. Your baby isn't a generic baby, at all. Instantly, it's a person with whom you have a relationship that's closer, perhaps, than every relationship you've ever had, and that you can keep perfect, right? Most of the relationships that you've had already are with people who are screwed up in 50 different ways, and so are you, but here you've got this baby. It's not ruined, yet. You have this possibility of maintaining this relationship that starts out—that baby really likes you, and generally that continues for quite a long time. They're two years old, you come home, and they're really happy to see you. It's kind of like having a puppy. It's like, they're thrilled when you come home. How many people are thrilled when you come home? It's like, oh, it's you again. No, not a little kid. A little kid is thrilled when you come home, and you can keep that going. There's this pristine element to the potential relationship between parents and children that's terribly devalued in our society. It's almost as if we're willfully blind to it. I think it's an absolute catastrophe, because there's very little in life that can compare to establishing a proper relationship with a child. They make great company if you keep your relationship with them pristine.

It's worthwhile. The reason I'm telling you this is because people look at infants and they think this could be the potential saviour of mankind. That is what they think. That's how they act, so that's how they think. The thing is, it's also true. Now, how true it is, I don't know. But that's, I think, probably because people don't dare to find out. That's how it looks to me.

"In Christ's case, however—as He sacrificed Himself—God, his Father, is simultaneously sacrificing His Son. It's for this reason that the Christian sacrificial drama of Son and Self is archetypal. Nothing greater can be imagined. That's why it's an archetype: you can't push past it. That's the very definition of 'archetypal.' That's the core of what constitutes 'religious.' The greatest of all possible sacrifices is self and child. Of that there can be no doubt." "Pain and suffering define the world. Of that, equally, there can be no doubt. The person who wants to alleviate suffering—who wants to bring about the best of all possible futures; who wants to create Heaven on Earth—will therefore sacrifice everything he has to God—to life in the Truth." So that's a page and a half from the book that I'm going to release in January. Back to Genesis. We're already up to Genesis 4. "And Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived, and bore Cain."

to Genesis 4. "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord."

This is after Adam and Eve have been chased out of the garden of Eden. What's really cool about this—I really think that the Cain and Abel story is the most profound story I've ever read, especially given that you can tell it in 15 seconds. I won't, because I tend not to tell stories in 15 seconds, as you may have noticed. But you can read the whole thing that quickly. It's so densely packed that it's actually unbelievable.

Ok, so the first thing is that Adam and Eve are not the first two human beings. Cain and Abel are the first two human beings. Adam and Eve were made by God, and they were born in paradise. It's like, what kind of human beings are those? You don't know any human beings like that. Human beings aren't born in paradise and made by God. Human beings are born of other human beings. That's the first thing. It's post-fall. We're out in history, now. We're not in some archetypal beyond—although we are still, to some degree. Not to the degree that was the case with the story of Adam and Eve. We've already been thrown out of the garden; we're already self-conscious; we're already awake; we're already covered; we're already working. We're full-fledged human beings. So you have the first two human beings: Cain and Abel; prototypical human beings.

What's cool is that humanity enters history at the end of the story of Adam and Eve, and then the archetypal patterns for human behaviour are instantaneously presented. It's absolutely mind boggling, and it's not a very nice story. They're hostile brothers. They've got their hands around each other's throats, so to speak, or at least that's the case in one direction. It's a story of the first two human beings engaged in a fratricidal struggle, that ends in the death of the best one of them. That's the story of human beings in history. If that doesn't give you nightmares, you didn't understand the damn story.

Now, in these hostile brother stories, which are very, very common, often the older brother—Cain—has some advantages. He's the older brother, and, in an agricultural community, the older brother generally inherited the land, and not the younger brothers. And the reason for that was, well, let's say you have like eight sons, and you have enough land to support a bit of a family, and you divide among your eight sons, and they have eight sons, and they divide it among their eight sons. Soon, everyone has a little postage stamp that they can stand on and starve to death on. And so that just doesn't work. You hand the land in a piece to the eldest son, and that's just how it is. It's tough luck for the rest of them, but at

least they know they're gonna have to go and make their own way. It's not fair, but there's no way of making it fair.

Well, you might say the oldest son has an additional stake in the stability of the current hierarchy. He has more of a stake in the status quo. That makes him more of an emblematic representative of the status quo, and, perhaps, more likely to be blind in its favor. It's something like that. That motif creeps up very frequently in the hostile brothers archetypal struggle. The story of Cain and Abel fits this pattern, because Cain is the one who won't budge, and who won't move. He's stubborn. Whereas the younger son, who's Abel, is often the one who's more...Not so much of a revolutionary, but, perhaps, more of a balance between the revolutionary and the traditions, whereas the older son tends to be more traditionalist-authoritarian—in these metaphorical representations, at least.

"And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord." There's the first human being: Cain. I told you that the Mesopotamians thought that mankind was made out of the blood of the worst demon that the great goddess of chaos could imagine. Well, the first human being is a murderer, and not only a murderer, but a murderer of his own brother. And so, you know, the Old Testament, that's a hell of a harsh book. And you might think, well, maybe that's a little bit too much to bear. And then you might think, yea, and maybe it's true, too. So that's something to think about.

Human beings are amazing creatures. To think about us as a plague on the planet is its own kind of bloody catastrophe—malevolent, low, quasi-genocidal metaphor. But that doesn't mean that we aren't without our problems. The fact that this book, that sits at the cornerstone of our culture, would present the first man as a murderer of his brother, is something that should really set you back on your heels.

"And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground."

There you see a very old representation. There's Abel. He's got his sheep up on the altar. Cain is bringing a sheaf of wheat. I don't know exactly what's happening here. Blood, or it's a ray, perhaps. It's something like that. The overall impression of the image is that something transcendent is communicating with this sacrifice. You think, oh, how primitive. How primitive, that these people were sacrificing to their God. It's like, those people weren't stupid, and this is not primitive. Whatever it is, it's not primitive. It's sophisticated beyond

belief. The idea, as I already pointed out, is that you could sacrifice something of value, and that that would have transcendent utility. That is by no means an unsophisticated idea. In fact, it might be the greatest idea that human beings ever came up with.

It's an answer to the problem that's put forward in the story of Adam and Eve, right? We became self-conscious, and then we discovered the future, and then we knew we were going to die, and then we knew we were vulnerable, and then we became ashamed, and then we developed the knowledge of good and evil, and then we got thrown out of paradise. It's like, that's a big problem. So what the hell are you going to do about it? Sacrifice. That's the hypothesis. Well, that's a hell of a hypothesis, man. That's what we're doing. You make plenty of sacrifices—even to sit in this theater—and many people made plenty of sacrifices to have a theater like this exist. Many people made sacrifices so that we could actually freely engage in the dialog that we're engaging in, in a theater like this. All of this is built on sacrifice, and sacrifice bloody well better work, because we do not have a better idea.

Sacrifice. What's the counter position? Murder and theft. So, let's go with sacrifice, shall we? And, perhaps, we won't consider it so damn primitive. It's not so primitive.

"And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground."

Some people have read into this the eternal battle between herdsmen and agriculturalists, which raged in the American West, for example. The herdsmen like to have their herds, sheep, cattle, go wherever they were going to go. The agriculturalists—the farmers—have things fenced off. The agriculturalists actually won in the final analysis. But, anyways, Abel is a keeper of sheep, and that's interesting, because that makes him a shepherd. I think that's part of the critical issue, here, because a shepherd—we talked a little about shepherds before. If you look at Michelangelo's statue of David, which is another staggering work...I mean, that David, he's no trivial figure. Of course, it's David who slays Goliath, right? Goliath is like the giant of the patriarchal enemy. It's something like that. Middle Eastern shepherds take care of sheep, and they're edible, and the lambs are very vulnerable, and there were lots of wild animals around. It wasn't like England in the 16th century. There were lions, and you got a slingshot, or a stick, or some damn thing, and so your job was to keep the

sheep organized and not let them be eaten by the lions—alone. You had to have a clue, and be tough, and self-reliant, and all of those things. You had to be tough and self-reliant. You had to be able to take care of a lot of vulnerable things, and you had to be able to do it on your own. That's all built into the shepherd metaphor. It's not a great metaphor for modern people, because we tend to think of the shepherd like some [Little Lord Fauntleroy](#), and certainly not as a lion-killing, hyper-masculine monster. That's not a shepherd. Shepherd's dance around, and, you know...That's not the metaphor, here.

"Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord." Ok, so he's participating in this sacrificial ritual. "And Abel, he brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering."

You don't know why that is. This is a built-in ambiguity, I think. I think there's textual hints, but I'm not sure. "Abel brought the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof." Ok, so what does that mean? Well, he brought a high-quality sacrifice. You don't know that Abel's sacrifice is low quality, because it doesn't say that, you know, Abel brought God some wilted lettuce and then burnt it. It doesn't say that. But there isn't a sentence, there, that talks about how high quality Cain's sacrifice is. But, in any case, the Lord has respect unto Abel and his offering. So there's a hint that Abel's putting a little bit more into the whole sacrificial thing than Cain. But there's also a hint that, maybe, God is just liking you a little better than he's liking him. That's, I think, useful from a literary perspective, because there is that arbitrariness about life.

One of my own children, for example, has had...Things come easy to him. He's lucky; fortunate. However you want to put it. He seems to be that sort of person. Whereas my other child, it's like, it's just like one horrible, Job-like catastrophe after another. It's so strange to see that, because, as far as I can tell, the characterological differences are certainly not accounting for the difference in destiny. The one child, who's had so much trouble, was just a wonderful child... Amazingly happy, easy to get along with, fun, and she had a terrible time of it. So, who knows what God's up to, but distributing fate equally certainly isn't one of them.

"And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth."



Angry. Wroth is a tough word. These are translated many times. It's hard to get the full flavour of the words. But, "wroth, and his countenance fell," well, to have your countenance fell... This is sort of up. To fall is to have it be heavy, depressed, for sure. Angry, for sure. Resentful, probably. Wroth: that's anger. So, Cain is not a happy clam, that his hard work has been rejected by God. Now that's worth thinking about. You think about how human that story is. You're out there—well, we could say, you might be a useless character, and you're whining about how catastrophic your life is. It's pretty much obvious to everyone around you, and to you, that it's your fault. You just don't try: you don't wake up in the morning; you don't get a job; you don't engage in things; you're cynical; you're bitter; you're angry; you don't try to help the people near you; you don't try to fix up your own life, and you don't take care of yourself. And then things go wrong. It's like, well, really? What did you expect? But that doesn't mean someone in that situation will just say, well, that's ok; I deserve it; and they'll be happy about it. They won't. They'll be absolutely bitter about it and angry. But, you know, put that aside for a moment. There are people who seem to struggle very forthrightly, let's say, and still have one catastrophe after another happen to them. There's no easy answer in this story. It's like, you can fall afoul of God because your sacrifices are second rate, or you can just fall afoul of God, and you don't know why. Well, tough luck for you. And then what happens, in either case, is exactly this, almost inevitably: "Cain was wroth, and his countenance fell."

People like this write to me all the time. I've seen this in many, many clients. They're not often 20. 30, more commonly. Sometimes, 40. Their lives haven't gone well. They're in a pit of despair, of one form or another, and not only are they in a pit despair, but they're extraordinarily angry about it, and God only knows what they'd do with that anger if they had that opportunity to give it full voice.

One of the things I've always thought about Hitler is that people... You have to admire Hitler. That's the thing. He was an organizational genius. The thing that doesn't stop people from being Hitler... People don't refuse the ambition to become Hitler because they don't have the genocidal motivation. They don't follow that pathway because they don't have the organizational genius. They've got the damn motivation. If you take a hundred people, randomly, and you talk to them—and you really talk to them—you'll find that five percent of them would take their vengeful thoughts pretty damn far if they were just given the opportunity, and, in fact, they do. They make life miserable for themselves, and

often for their family, and, sometimes, for anybody they can come near. And then maybe another 20 percent of people have that bubble up in them on a pretty damn regular basis. You can have some sympathy for Cain. If you don't have any sympathy for Cain, then you're not... See, Cain and Abel don't just represent two archetypal types of being. It's not like you're Cain, and you're Abel. It's like, you're half and half, and you're half and half, and you're half and half. It's something like this. This is two different potential patterns of destiny. You don't manifest one purely and the other zero. It's like the line between good and evil that runs down the human heart. It's exactly the same idea. Maybe you're more like Cain, or maybe you're more like Abel, but there's still a little Cain in you, no matter how Abel you are. And maybe more than a little—and probably more than a little. If you watch your fantasies, which I would very much recommend, you'll find that they show you dark things about you that will shock you if you allow yourself to be conscious of what you're thinking.

When you're having an argument with someone, especially someone that you love, it's a good time to just watch the pictures that flash in the back of your mind. That's part of, let's say, coming into contact with what Carl Jung called the shadow. The shadow is the manifestation of Cain. That's a perfectly good way of thinking about it. One of the things that Jung said about the shadow—because Jung was not someone that you mess around with lightly. He said the human shadow has roots that reach all the way to hell. Jung meant that. That's no metaphor for him. He might not have meant it in the same way that a fundamentalist Christian from the Southern U.S. might mean it, but I would say that Jung meant it in a way that's far more terrifying, and also far more true. "And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell."

So there's Abel, burning his offering away, there. He's in this sort of relationship with... let's call them the archetypal figure of culture. The archetypal Father. It's something he respects. That's the thing—the posture's an indication of respect. And then there's Cain, in the background. His face is in shadow. He's jealous of what's happening. He's going through the motions, perhaps, and maybe God just doesn't like him. We don't know. But he's going through the motions. He's not very happy about it. That's actually a phrase that you could carve into many people's tombstones as an epitaph for their life: went through the motions, but wasn't very happy about it. This is really an interesting one, I think. I don't know what God's doing here, exactly. He's helping ignite the sacrificial flame. That's kind of an interesting idea, I think, because... Let's say you have an impulse to make a sacrifice. You think, well, I should change this about my life. Well, where does that come from. that impulse? It just manifests itself out of

nothing, or you came up with it. Well, you might want to stop thinking so surely that you come up with your own thoughts. You don't come up with your damn dreams, do you? They just happen. God only knows where they come from. They come from your brain—oh, boy; that's a sophisticated answer. They come from your unconscious. Well, that's not much better. At least it's somewhat better. Those amazing dramas take place in the theater of your imagination at night. You don't even understand what they are, and yet they occur night after night.

Dreams can contain wisdom that it just... Well, it just staggers the person who has the dream once they get the key to the dream, and once they remember it. It's like, oh, look, you just revealed a bunch of wisdom to yourself that you didn't know. Where did that come from? You don't know. How in the world can you dream up things that you don't know? That's a tough one. Maybe we'll talk about that, at some point, in this lecture series, because there are some reasonable things that can be said about that. The idea that there's something that's not you... Jung would call it the Self, which he thought of as the totality of your being across time and space. It's something like that, and that, you know, each second that you exist is a slice of the Self manifesting itself across time and space. He thought of the Self as partly the voice of conscious, whatever that is, that helps guide you when you have to make a difficult decision. A difficult decision might be, well, what do I need to sacrifice? How do I need to discipline myself? What do I need to forego? Well, how do you figure those things out? This picture is trying to put forth the idea that, perhaps, if you'd established the proper relationship with God the Father—and we've talked about what that might mean—then he would help figure out how to get the sacrificial fires burning, so that you could stay in a proper relationship with Him across time. Is that such an unreasonable proposition? What's the alternative proposition? Well, this isn't working out very well. That's for sure.

Cain seems to be doing... I don't know what it is. It's as if he thinks he can only do it himself, or maybe he wants only to take credit for it, or something like that. He's not in this... Grateful, let's say, and inquiring. Grateful and inquiring posture. That's what a prayerful posture should be. It should be grateful and inquiring. Grateful is, thank God things aren't worse for me than they are. You should be grateful about that, because they could be a lot worse than they are, man. They can be so bad. Inquiring would be, well, I don't really know how I could make it better, but I'm open to suggestions. If I can figure out how to do it, I'll try it. That's the humility: a humble inquiry. How could I make things better?

It's something like that. What sacrifices do I need to make in order to make things better? That's a good question to ask yourself.

You could ask yourself that every morning. What sacrifice do I have to make to make things better? You can decide what constitutes better. How about that? Then, it's not even as if it's being imposed on you. Come up with your own notion of what constitutes better. Try to make it sophisticated. It shouldn't just be better for you, because that isn't going to work very well, right? You're just going to fall down stairs if you do that, because you have to live with other people. And besides, it's stupid. What are you going to do? There's nothing you can even say about that. It's so... That's the attitude of a very badly behaved, hyper-aggressive two year old. I mean that technically. You could ask yourself, well, I have this day that lays itself out in front of me. What thing could I let go of that's impeding my progress, that, if I let go of, would make my life better, and my family's life better, and my culture's life better, and my being better? That would give you something to do for the day, wouldn't it? And to justify your miserable life.

You need that. That's the whole point of the first story of Adam and Eve. What do you have? A miserable life. Ok. What am I going to do about that? Well, if you just have a miserable life, you're just going to suffer stupidly and get bitter about it. That's what happens to Cain. It's like, well, how about not doing that? That just seems to take a bad deal and make it worse. How about making a sacrifice, and seeing if you can please God and put being on track? God, that would be something to do. What could be better than that? What could possibly be better than that? That's why it's archetypal, man, because nothing's better than that. That's where it tops out.

You can do that. You can do that every day. You have to do it in a little way, because what good are you? You're not going to go and bring this socialist utopia into being in one fell swoop. You might also think that one of the things Cain might figure out there—there are a couple of things that aren't just going right for him. Downwind of the fire? Not the right place to blow from. And the fact that he's enveloped in haze and smoke, and breathing it in, and the fire isn't burning, might be an indication that he's doing something wrong, or he would be wiping his eyes and saying, Jesus, what kinda stupid bloody universe would produce smoke like this? It's like, yes, well, that's a more likely outcome. "And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?"

Now that's an interesting line. I've looked at a variety of different translations of this seventh verse. That's a critical line, and the translation really matters. I'll tell you what I think this story is, and what I've been able to figure out. I'm sure I haven't got it completely right. God says, if you do well, won't you be accepted? There's a hint there, right? It's something like, well, things aren't going so well for you. The first thing you might think is, you're not doing well. Does that mean you're not doing good? Does that not mean you're not acting properly? It's the hint. God is suggesting that, if you were acting properly, you would be successful.

I had a friend, at one point, who was a very bitter person. He had a bunch of problems. Some of them were self-inflicted, and some of them were fate, I suppose. He had become very, very destructive—murderously destructive. Genocidally destructive, I would say. You could see it in his dreams. He lived with me for a while. I knew him very well. He was a friend of mine from the time I was 12 until the time he committed suicide, when he was about 40. When he lived with me, I was trying to help him get on his feet, which was why he had come to live with me. He thought that maybe I could help him get up on his feet. He could only take relatively low-level jobs. He had some mechanical ability. He didn't get educated, but he was a very, very smart person. He probably had an IQ of 135, or something like that. He was bitter, too, because he hadn't educated himself to the level that his intellect would have demanded. He had to take jobs that were beneath him, intellectually. He had that real intellectual arrogance, and really smart people often come to believe that only smart matters. If they're smart, and all that matters is smart, and then the world is sort of laying itself at their feet, then they've been terribly betrayed. Then they point to their intelligence, which is more like a talent or a gift. It's like a false idol, which is exactly what it is, and a very dangerous one. They get cynical about the stupidity of the world and the fact that their talents weren't properly recognized. That's just not that helpful. Smart is a good thing, but, I'll tell you, if you don't use it properly, it will devour you, just like all arbitrarily assigned talent. You might have the talent, but it's your friend if use it properly. If you misuse it, it will be your enemy. Maybe that's how God keeps the cosmic scales adjusted.

Anyhow, my friend was a very smart person, although not as smart as he thought he was, unfortunately. He hadn't done what would have been necessary with that intelligence to make it manifest itself properly in the world. That also embittered him, because he also knew that there was more that he could have done if he would have done it, and perhaps more that he could still do. What I was

suggesting to him while he was living with us—because he was two levels from homeless at that point—was that he should find a job that he could find—working in a garage, working in a shop, or something like that, because he had some mechanical ability—and that he should separate himself from the arrogance that made him presume that such a job would be beneath him. At that point, no job was beneath him, but, more importantly, it's not so obvious that jobs are beneath people.

Imagine that you have a job as a checkout person in a grocery store. That's a fairly unskilled job. You can be some miserable, resentful, horrid bastard doing that job. You can come in there just exuding resentment and bitterness, and making mistakes, and making sure that every customer that passes by you has a slightly worse day than they need to. You can pilfer time—and, perhaps, pilfer goods—and be resentful about the people who gave you the position, because they're above you in the dominance hierarchy, and you can gossip behind the backs of your coworkers. You can take your menial position—self-described—and turn that into a very nice little slice of hell. That's for sure.

I always think of the archetypal diner in that way. You guys have been in this diner. There's a really good opposite diner. There's a great diner on YouTube. It's Tom Waits reading a poem by Bukowski. I think it's called [Nirvana](#). It's about a good diner that he happened to visit when he was a kid. A diner where everything was going well. You could listen to that. It's great. But this is the opposite diner, that I'm thinking about. You go into a diner, right. It's seven o'clock in the morning. You order some bacon and eggs and some toast. You look around the diner, and you think, it was like 1975 when the windows were last washed. There's this kind of thick coating of who-gives-a-damn grease on the walls. The floor, too, has got that sort of stickiness that you really have to work at to develop over the years. The waitress is not happy to be there. The guy behind the counter isn't happy that that happens to be the waitress that he's working with. And then you walk down the stairs to the washroom, and that's its own little trip. You come back, and you order your damn eggs, and you order your toast, and you order your bacon. It comes, and the eggs are too cooked on the bottom, so they're kind of brown, and then they're kind of raw on top. They're cold in the middle. You really have to work to cook an egg like that, man, but you can master that with like 10 years of bitterness. It will teach you how to cook an egg like that. And then the toast—here's what you do with the toast. You take the white bread—the pre-sliced stuff that no one should ever eat—and then you put that in the toaster, and you overcook it. You wait, and then

you pop it out of the toaster. Because it's overcooked, you scrape it off. You knock off the crumbs so that it doesn't look too burnt, and then you wait until it's cold, and then you put cold margarine on it. First of all, it's not butter. But, if you put cold margarine on it, you can also kinda tear holes in it. Then it has lumps of margarine in it, and it's really dry, except where it's too greasy. That's like its own little work of art, man.

You put that on the side with eggs. And then you have the potatoes. This is how you cook the potatoes properly: the leftover potatoes—and you keep dumping new leftover potatoes into the old leftover potatoes, over weeks. Some of the potatoes have half returned to mother earth. Then you flap them on the grill, and you sort of burn them a bit, I guess. And then you slap them on the plate. Jesus. You don't want to eat those, man. That's for sure. That's the point.

You have the bacon, and you want to make sure you buy the lowest possible quality bacon. That's how you start. Then you throw it on the grill—and your grill has to be overheated to do this—and you have to cook the bacon so that it's raw in places and burnt in other places. It has that delightful pig-like odor that only really cheap, badly-cooked bacon can provide. Or maybe you use those little breakfast sausages that no one in their bloody right mind would let within 15 feet of anything living. And then you serve that. And you serve it with the kind of orange juice that is only orange is color, and with coffee that's...Agh... What would you say? It was started too early in the morning. That's the first thing. Bad quality coffee started too early in the morning—got cold once or twice, and has been reheated. And then you serve that with whitener. It's like, here's your breakfast! It's like, no, man. That's not breakfast. That's hell, and you created it. And then what you do if you have a diner like that is—because you have a miserable life if you have a diner like that, and you really worked on that—you go home, and you curse your wife, and you curse your kids, and you fucking well curse God, too, for producing a universe where a diner like yours is allowed to exist. And that's your bloody life. Also, that's what God's trying to point out, here.

"If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." Well, I looked at lots of translations for this. Actually, the next line is, "And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."

Yes. What God actually says is something like this... Things aren't going so well for you, but if you were behaving properly, they would. But, instead, this is what you've done. Sin came to your door, and sin means to pull your arrow back and

you've done. Sin came to your door, and sin means to pull your arrow back and to miss the target. Sin came to your door. But he uses a metaphor. The metaphor is something like, sin came to your door like this sexually aroused cat-predator thing, and you invited it in. And then you let it have its way with you. It's like you entered into a creative—he uses a sexual metaphor. You entered into a creative exchange with it, and gave birth to something as a consequence. What you gave birth to, that's your life. And you knew it. You're self-conscious, after all. You knew you were doing this. You conspired with this thing to produce the situation that you're in.

Jung said something similar about the Oedipal mother situation. What he said was very politically incorrect. Of course, every single he wrote was politically incorrect. That's how you could tell that he was a thinker, by the way. He talked about the unholy alliance between hyper-dependent children and their mothers. He said, well, it's actually—Freud thought about it as a maternal thing. I'm not putting Freud down. Freud mapped out the Oedipal situation brilliantly. I'm not putting Freud down. But, you know, Jung was taking the ideas and expanding them outward. He said that there is actually an unholy alliance between a hyper-dependent child and an Oedipal, over-dependent mother. The alliance was, the mother would always offer—so maybe the kid is supposed to go off and do something that would require a little bit of courage and effort. The mother says, well, are you sure you're feeling well enough to do it? And then the child could say, yes, or the child could say no. But the thing is, the child made the damn decision, too. You might think, well, that's pretty harsh. But just because children are little, that doesn't mean they're stupid.

You don't know children if you don't know how children know how to manipulate. They are staggeringly good at that. They're studying you nonstop, trying to figure out, A, what you're up to, and B, how they can get what they want in the way that they want it. They can play a manipulative game, no problem, especially if they're well schooled in it. It's sort of like that. Maybe the mother is a little timid and a little inclined to over-protect, and maybe the child is a little manipulative, and a little willing to not take that courageous step out into the world, and to regress into infantile dependency, instead. Then you get a terrible dynamic building across time that is like a vicious circle, or like a positive feedback loop. It just expands and expands and expands. Sometimes, in families, you see a hyper-dependent child and a perfectly independent child, and the same mother. Mothers are very complex, and mother for child A and mother for child B are not the same mother, even if they happen to be the same human being. The literature's quite clear on that, but you get my point.



God's idea was that, not only are you not doing well, but you're not doing well because you've actually really spent a lot of work figuring out how to not do well. This is like creative effort on your part. If you want to read about truly malevolent people, you could start with the Columbine killers. They left some very interesting diaries behind. I would recommend them. There's plenty of serial killers you could read about, and the people who've really gone out and done dark things. I've read more than my fair share of that sort of thing, and I understand it quite well. If you really want to have your countenance fall and be wroth, 10 years of brooding on your own catastrophe, sort of alone, and letting your fantasies take shape, and egging them on, allowing them to flourish and, let's say, take possession of you...That's exactly the right way to think about it. That will get you somewhere like this. There are more people who are like that than you think, and you're more like that than you think.

So, Cain is obviously not very happy about this whole answer. The last thing you want to hear if your life has turned into a catastrophe and you take God to task for creating a universe where that sort of thing was allowed, is that it's your own damn fault, and that you should straighten up and fly right, so to speak, and that you shouldn't be complaining about the nature of being. But that is the answer he gets. Then what happens? Well, we have to infer that, if Cain was angry before, he's a lot more angry now. Of course, that's exactly what the story reveals.

"And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass. when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him."

I'm going to read you something else. This is foreshadowing. This is from the same chapter, by the way.

"Do what is meaningful, not what is expedient. Jesus was led into the wilderness, according to the story, to be tempted by the Devil (Mathew 4:1), prior to his crucifixion. This is the story of Cain, restated abstractly. Cain is far from happy, as we have seen. He's working hard, or so he thinks, but God is not pleased. Meanwhile, Abel is dancing away in the daisies. His crops flourish. Women love him. Worst of all, he's a pretty good good guy. Everyone knows it. He deserves his good fortune. All the more reason to hate him."

When I used to teach at Harvard, now and then my wife would have some of the younger graduates over. We used to joke afterwards, because many of them were very remarkable kids. They were super smart. or they were athletic. or they had

some dramatic ability, or they were musicians, or they'd done some spectacular charitable work. Because, basically, to be accepted into Harvard, you had to be top of your damn school, and then you had to have at least two other outstanding things going for you. What was so annoying about most of these kids—this was our joke—you really both liked them and respected them. My joke was, you'd think they would have had the good graces to be dislikable sons of bitches, at least. With all those other great things going for them, they had to add respectability and likability to it, as well. So you thought, well, you know, it really couldn't happen to a better person. It's like, good God. Well, that's Abel's situation. The funny thing, too, is that that's an ideal. That's the ideal. An ideal person, let's say, would be someone who you would want to be like, and someone who is operating in the world like you would want to operate, and someone whose fortune is smiling on, and someone who is making the right sacrifices. It's really what you would want to be. And so Cain kills that.

It's a psychological story, too. You see this in the cynicism that people have about people who have done well in the world. They're always looking for some reason why they've done well. They must be crooked, or they must be conniving, or they must be arrogant, or they must be psychopathic, and, of course, all of those things exist. But it's a very bad trick to play on yourself to make the proposition that the person in the world who represents your own ideal is that ideal because of despicable reasons. Because what you do is train yourself that the ideal that you should pursue can only exist if it's motivated by despicable reasons. And then what? Not only is Abel, your brother, dead, as your brother, in the field, in reality, but you've also slaughtered your own ideal. Well then what the hell are you going to work for? How are you going to live, then? Bitterly and miserably. That's for sure. Bitterly, miserably, and hopelessly. That's how you're going to live. It's so rare that I see—especially publicly—that people honestly admit—with sports figures they'll do it. That's one place where that seems to happen. But it's so uncommon for expressions of admiration and gratitude to manifest themselves in any public communication, of any sort. Newspapers, TV, YouTube, Twitter. It's almost always undermining, backbiting, and criticism, and very often directed at people who have often done little else but bring good things into the world for other people. That's part of why this is such a profound story.

"He's a pretty good guy. Everyone knows it. He deserves his good fortune. All the more reason to hate him." That's for sure.

"Cain is a pretty good guy. Everyone knows it. He deserves his good fortune. All the more reason to hate him." That's for sure.

"Cain broods on his misfortune, like a vulture on an egg. He enters the desert wilderness of his own mind. He obsesses over his ill-fortune and betrayal. He nourishes his resentment. He indulges in ever-more elaborate fantasies of revenge. His arrogance grows to Luciferian proportions. I'm ill-used and oppressed, he thinks. This is a stupid bloody planet. It can go to hell. And with that, he encounters Satan in the wilderness, and falls prey to his temptations. He does what he can, in John Milton's unforgettable words, to confound the Race of Mankind in the first Root and mingle and involve Earth with hell—done all to spite the Great Creator. He turns to Evil to obtain what Good forbade him, and he does it voluntarily, self-consciously and with malice. Let him who has ears hear." So that's the first two human beings. The resentful, bitter, failure taking the axe to the admirable success. "And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not; Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What has thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;"

If you want to understand that, which I would recommend, you could read Dostoyevsky's [Crime and Punishment](#). That's a great novel. I think it might be the greatest novel ever written. I haven't read every novel, but, in my experience, it's the greatest novel. It is exactly this. It says what happens psychologically if you commit the ultimate crime. It's amazing. It's absolutely amazing. There's no psychologist like Dostoyevsky.

"When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. And Cain said unto the Lord, my punishment is greater than I can bear."

One of the things that's interesting about this is—I think the punishment that God lays on Cain...It's like the inevitable consequences of Cain's action. It's like, well, he killed his brother. There's no going back from that. Good luck forgiving yourself for that, especially if he was your ideal. Because you haven't just killed your brother—and, of course, tortured your parents and the rest of your family—you've deprived the community of someone who's upstanding, and you did it for the worst possible motivations. There's no up from there. That's as close to hell as you can manage on earth, I would say.

"And Cain said unto the Lord, my punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid..."

That, too. There's also no turning back to God, let's say, after an error like that. You've done everything you possibly could to spite God—assuming he exists—and the probability that you're going to be able to mend that relationship in your now-broken state, when you couldn't mend it to begin with, before you did something so terrible, starts to move towards zero.

"And it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him."

That's an interesting thing. I wondered about that for a long time. You might think, why would God take Cain under his wing, so to speak, given what's already happened? I think it has something to do with the emergence of the idea that it was necessary to prevent tit-for-tat revenge slayings. It's something like that. There's hints of that later in the text. It's like, well, I killed your brother, and then you killed two of my brothers, and then I kill your whole family, and then you kill my whole town, and then I kill your whole country, and then we blow up the world. That's probably not a very intelligent solution to the initial problem, even though the initial problem, which might be a murder, is not an easy thing to solve. But I think it's something like that.

That's William Blake. Adam and Eve have discovered their dead son. Cain has become cognizant, I would say, of what he did and of what he is. It's another entrance into a form of self-consciousness. The self-consciousness that Adam and Eve developed was painful enough. They become aware of their own vulnerability, nakedness, and, perhaps, even their capacity for evil. But Cain becomes aware of his voluntary engagement with evil itself, and sees that as a crucial, human capability.

That's something modern people...It's no wonder we don't take it seriously. Among intellectual circles, for decades, the idea of evil has been...It's like, what are you? Medieval, or something? The whole idea of evil is a nonstarter as an intellectual starting place, and as a topic. That's something that I've just been unable to understand. I cannot understand how you could possibly have more than a cursory knowledge of the history of the 20th century—much less a deep knowledge of the history of the 20th century—and walk away with any other conclusion than, well, good might not exist, but evil...The evidence for that is so overwhelming that only willful blindness could possibly explain denying its

...something that only a human creature could possibly explain anything in existence.

That was actually a useful discovery for me. I also concluded that, if it was true that evil existed, then it was true, by inference, that its opposite existed. The opposite of evil. Let's say the evil of the concentrate camp. We could get more specific about it. There's this one thing that used to happen in Auschwitz, where they would take people off the incoming trains—those who lived, and that weren't stacked around the outside of the train cars and frozen to death because it was too cold. Those who only had to be stuck in the middle, so it was warm enough. Maybe the old people died because they suffocated, but at least some of them were alive when they arrived at Auschwitz. They took those poor people out, and one of the tricks that the guards used to play on them was to have the newly arrived prisoners hoist like hundred pound sacks of wet salt and carry them from one side of the compound—and these compounds were big. This was a city. It wasn't like a gymnasium; it was like a city. Tens of thousands of people were there. They would have them carry the sack of wet salt from one side of the compound to the other, and then back. That was to make a mockery out of the notion that work would set you free. It's like, no, no. You work here, but there's nothing productive about it. The whole point is exactly the opposite of sacrifice, in some sense. We're going to make you act out working, but all it will do is speed your demise. And maybe we can decorate it up a little bit, because not only will it speed up your demise, it will do it in a very painful way, while simultaneously increasing the probability that other people's demises will be painful and sped up. It's a work of art. That's for sure. To know about that sort of thing and to not regard it as evil means...Well, you can figure out what it means for yourself.

"And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived..." A fairly common criticism of these Biblical stories is, well, if Cain and Abel were the only two people from Adam and Eve, where did all these other people come from? Doesn't that make the story simpleminded? No. That makes the reader simpleminded. I mean, really? That's the best criticism of this you're going to come up with? You might say, ah, you missed the point. That would be the right response: you missed the point.

"And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch, and he builded the city, and sold—" It's Cain that builds the cities and starts the civilization. That's pretty rough, too. It's the first fratricidal murderer who builds the cities

after the name of his son, Enoch.

"And unto Enoch was born Irad..." Et cetera, et cetera. I'm going through the generations. "And Lamech took unto him two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other was Zillah." This is an attempt to flesh out the genealogy and describe to how culture started, in some sense, in these tribal communities. "And Adah bare Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle. And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ. And Zillah, she also bear Tubalcain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron." Tubalcain, traditionally, is the first person who makes weapons of war. "And Lamech"—back to Lamech, descendent of Cain—"said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Heed my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold."

Well, what I see in that is this proclivity of this murderous capacity of Cain manifesting itself, as society develops, to a murderous intent that transcends the mere killing of a brother. You hurt me; I hurt you back. No—you hurt me; I kill you and six other people. The thing that happens after that is, it's not to make it seven people, but to make it seventy people. And so there's this idea that once that first murderous seed is sown, it has this proclivity to manifest itself exponentially. That's a warning. That's also why, I think, Tubalcain, who's one of Cain's descendants, was the first person who made weapons of war.

And that's pretty much the story of Cain and Abel. It's a hell of a story, as far as I can tell. I think it's worth thinking about pretty much forever. It has so many facets. I think the most usefully revealing of those facets is the potential for the story, once understood, to shed light on not your own failure—not even on your rejection by being, let's say—but on the proclivity to murder the best, and the best in you, for revenge upon that violation. What that means—and we know that knowledge of good and evil entered the world, so to speak, with Adam and Eve's transgression—is that now, not only does humanity have to contend with tragedy and suffering, and even the unharvested fruits of proper sacrifice, but with the introduction of real malevolence into the world.

There's the Fall into history, and then there's the discovery of sacrifice as a medication for the Fall. And then there's a counterposition, which is the emergence of malevolence as the enemy of proper sacrifice. And that's where

we're left at the end of Cain and Abel. And that's the end of that lecture. Thank you.

## VI: The Psychology of the Flood

So I'm going to launch right into it. I like this story, as well. This is the story of Noah and the Flood and the Tower of Babel, which I think are juxtaposed very interestingly. The Tower of Babel was one of those stories, like Cain and Abel, that was only a few lines long. It's like a fragment, although the story of Noah is quite a well-developed narrative. But like the other stories that we've covered, it is relevant at multiple levels of analysis simultaneously.

I'm going to start with some psychological background information so that the story makes sense. The first thing that I'd like to make a case for is that you bring to bear on the world an [a priori](#) perceptual structure. That's really an embodied structure, and it's a consequence of the 3.5 billion years that you've spent putting your body together, which is a tremendous amount of time—not only your body, but your mind, of course. The mind is part of the body and very much embedded within it. You tend to think that you have your brain in your head, and it's sort of floating separate from the rest of your body. That's not really true. You have a tremendous, massive system of neurons running through your entire body. There's more neurons in the [autonomic nervous system](#) than there are in the central nervous system. That's a lot of neurons. Your central nervous system, of course, enables you to exercise voluntary control over your musculature, and also to receive information from it. Your brain is distributed through your body. One of the things you may not know is that people who are paraplegic can walk if you suspend them above a treadmill. Their legs will walk by themselves with no voluntary control. Your spine is capable of quite complex activity. In fact, when you walk, it's controlled fall, and mostly your spine is doing it.

So anyways, the point of all that is that you don't have a blank slate consciousness that's interpreting a world that manifests itself as segregated objects in some straightforward sense. You have a built-in interpretative system that's extraordinarily, deeply embedded and invisible. You might think about it as the implicit structure of your unconscious. It's what gives rise to your conscious experience. It presents you with the world. That's one way of thinking about it. It's a good way of thinking about it. It's the psychoanalytic way of thinking about it as well as the neuroscientific way of thinking about it.

One of the things that's pretty interesting about modern neuroscientists—



especially the top rate ones, and those are usually the ones who are working on emotions, as far as I've been able to tell—is that they are often quite enamoured of the psychoanalysts. [Jaak Panksepp](#) was a good example of that. They came to understand the psychoanalyst's insistence on underlying, unconscious, personified motivations as an accurate reflection of how the brain worked. So you can think of yourself as a loose collection of autonomous spirits that's governed by some overarching identity. That's a reasonable way of thinking about it. A question that arises from that is, what is the nature of this a priori structure that you use to interpret the world? I think the clearest answer to that is that it's a story, and that you live inside the story.

That's very, very interesting to me. I believe—I have a couple of videos that lay this out—that Darwinian presuppositions are, at least, as fundamental as Newtonian presuppositions. I actually think that they're more fundamental. The fact that we've evolved story-like structures through which to interpret the world indicates to me that there's something deeply true about story-like structures. They're true, at least, insofar as the fact that we've developed them means that here we are, living, and that it's taken 3.5 billion years to develop them. They're highly functional. We don't have a much better definition of truth than highly functional. That's about as good as it gets, partly because we're limited creatures and we don't have omniscient knowledge.

The best we can do with our knowledge, generally speaking, is to note its functionality and improve it when it fails to work properly. I think the scientific method actually does that. The fact that we've evolved a story-like structure through which to interpret the world is pretty damn interesting. It says something fundamental about stories. It's strange in the same way that the fact that we have hemispheric specialization for the known and the unknown—or for order and chaos, respectively—also says something fundamental about the nature of the world—if you assume that we've evolved to reflect the structure of the world, broadly speaking. That's obviously not just the physical structure—the atoms and the molecules—but all of the pattern manifestations of the physical molecules as they build structures of increasing complexity across time. That would include human interactions, political interactions, economic interactions, familial interactions—all of those things that are a very important part of our reality, but perhaps, in some sense, are not as fundamental as the physical attributes that the physicists concentrate on.

So we live in stories. I want to talk to you a little bit about stories and their structure. When you understand a little bit about the structure of stories, then a

structure. When you understand a little bit about the structure of stories, then a whole array of things about mythology all of a sudden make overwhelming sense. It's so useful. What you see is that many of the things that are standard occurrences in everyone's life are portrayed universally in mythology. It's very helpful. First of all, it deisolates you. One of the things you learn as a clinical psychologist—contra the anti-psychiatrists, let's say—is that diagnosis is often a relief to people. There's a problem with being diagnosed: you might be labelled, and the label can follow you for the rest of your life. Once you're labelled as a something, then strange things happen around you that often reinforce that label. Maybe you start acting it out more, or you adopt it as an identity. There's a flip side of that, which is that the last thing you ever want to hear when you go see a physician or a psychologist is, you know, I've never seen a case like yours before. Right. That is not a relief, man. If the message is, I've never heard anything like what you're telling me, the outcome is going to be either not so good for you or you're not going to get listened to at all. You're such an anomaly that your existence is annoying to the integrated knowledge structure of the medical profession that you're attempting to receive advice from. It's definitely the case because, you know, if you can be put in a box, then the box tells the doctor what to do with you.

That's actually a relief to the doctor, but also a relief to you, right? You come and say, look, I can't go out of my house much anymore. I'm afraid on elevators. I have heart palpitations, and I sometimes end up in the emergency room. My interactions in the world are increasingly restricted. I find myself staying at home. I'm afraid I'm going to die of a heart attack. The psychologist says, well, you have agoraphobia. It's like, lots of people have that. Here's usually how it developed, and here's the treatment course. We can probably do something about that. Well, you're not going to die of a heart attack now, probably. That's a real relief. You're not crazy in a completely unique way, and you're crazy in a way that might be treatable. And so it's such a relief. People come in there with a pile of snakes of indeterminate magnitude, and they walk out with one manageable snake. It's still a snake, but one manageable snake beats a hydra.

Back to stories. The stories that we tell and that we live in are fundamentally ways that we deal with the complexity of the world. The fundamental problem with the world, as far as I can tell, is that not only is it complex beyond your comprehension, but the complexity shifts in unpredictable ways. That's the Darwinian conundrum, actually. That's why Darwinism seems to be a practical necessity with regards to the continuation of life. The complexity changes unpredictably, and you can't necessarily tell what's going to work in the future.

The Darwinian process solves that by generating quasi-random variations and letting whichever one by happenstance happens to work in that environment survive. It's not random, precisely, because the underlying structure is conserved. It's very rare that a child would be born with an extra arm, or something like that. The skeletal structure that you inhabit is shared by animals going way, way back in evolutionary history. There's a lot of conservation in the evolutionary process. There's variation within conservation—like music. It's a good way of thinking about it. The stories that we tell have exactly the same structure. They have this core element with variations.

All right. I'll turn to the stories. The first problem, as I mentioned, is the complexity problem. Things are just too complicated to get a handle on. That actually has serious consequences. What happens to everyone, eventually, is that their lives become so complicated that they die. Many terrible things can happen to you on the way to dying, as well. You can develop a serious illness that you can't get a handle on. You can hit an impasse in your relationship that you see no way out of. That happens to people quite frequently. People who are suicidal, for example, often feel like they've been backed into a corner—that they have no good options. There's something terrible to face no matter which way they turn, and they can't see any way out of it. Sometimes, that's more true than you'd like to think.

We also tend to like to think that people's problems are primarily psychological, but they're not. One thing that you learn quite rapidly as a clinician is that most of the time people don't come to you because they have a mental illness: they come to you because they have a complexity management problem. Their lives have got out of hand on them. They don't know how to get them back under control. All sorts of things can do that. And then, of course, that can make you anxious or depressed. It can trigger all sorts of illnesses. But the fundamental problem is still that things have got beyond you. That actually has a psychophysiological cost that isn't merely psychological. You have a limited amount of capacity—from a resource perspective—to deal with emergent complexity. There's just not enough of you. You'll exhaust your psychophysiological resources if you get into a situation that's too complex. Well, that's what the idea of chaos represents. It represents that underlying complexity that can manifest itself at any time. For example, you wake up in the morning and feel an ache of some sort. Perhaps it's nothing, and you ignore it. It gets worse, and you end up going to the hospital. You find out, perhaps, that you have pancreatic cancer, and that you're going to live for six months, and that's

the end of that. It's at that moment that you break through the thin ice that everyone walks on and you see what's underneath. What's underneath is the ineradicable complexity of life. That's chaos.

It's taken people a long, long time to get a grip on this conceptual schema. Human beings have done it mostly with image and story before they've been able to do it in any articulated manner. There are a set of images that represent this underlying chaos. One of them is the dragon of chaos—precisely that. That's the dragon that the hero goes out to confront; the symbol of the unknown; the thing that lurks underneath. It's the thing that also guards treasure. In the unknown, there's the possibility for treasure. Also, the water that was there at the beginning—that we talked about in the Mesopotamian creation myth—both the salt and the fresh water, is often a symbol of pre-cosmogonic chaos. Some of you have had this dream, I suspect. You'll dream that you're in a house that you know well. All of a sudden you discover a new room or a set of new rooms, or maybe a set of rooms in the basement. Often the rooms are not well organized, and they're full of water. Those are very common things. What that means is that you've broken through the constraints of your conscious self-understanding to a new domain of possibility, but a new domain that needs a tremendous amount of work. It says, well, here's a new part of you, but it's not well developed. It's flooded with chaos, essentially. It's water, I think, because chaos is not only what you fall into when you're not expecting it, but it's also the unknown that you confront forthrightly and generate new things out of. Water is a symbol of life, especially in a desert. Of course, life is dependent of water. Water's a natural symbol to utilize when you're talking about something that's life-giving but also potentially deadly. A little bit of water, that's a drink. But a lot of water, that's a shipwreck. Those are the extremes.

There are accounts that are sort of subtexts in Genesis, and elsewhere in the Old Testament, of God conquering a great monster, leviathan, or behemoth that has serpentine elements, and making the world as a consequence of that conflict. There's this idea that the world-creating force—which we've talked about as the logos—is the thing that continually confronts chaos, and that one way of thinking about chaos is as a predatory, reptilian monster, and often one that lives in the depths or, perhaps, underwater. Part of that, I think, is because we actually use our predator detection circuit to do this sort of precognitive process. The notion, fundamentally, is that anything that threatens instantaneously is something that your predatory detection circuit should be working with. It's fast, low resolution, and it doesn't have a lot of ideas—but it's really, really fast. That also accounts for our capability and tendency to very rapidly treat people who

also accounts for our capacity and tendency to very rapidly treat people who upset our conceptual structures as enemies of the predatory variety. We can fall into that in no time flat. It's the archetype. If something comes along to knock you for a loop, it's a shark; it's something that lurks under the water; it's something that will pull you down; it's an enemy. Usually you get prepared. That's a reasonable defensive strategy, even though it also has its dangers and could sometimes be wrong.

The landscape within which we have to erect our stories is fundamentally one of an overarching chaos—a chaos that exceeds our capacity to comprehend, in any sense: individually, familial, socially, economically. We're constantly threatened by the collapse of the structures that we inhabit. You own a house. How much time do you spend maintaining a house? Well, a lot. Why is that? It's because the house falls apart, and that's because you're stupid. The house falls apart because you do repairs wrong, or you ignore things, right? I'm saying this, actually, for technical reasons. The house falls apart because you're incompetent. But even if you're competent, the house falls apart. It's just entropy. Things have a proclivity to fall apart on their own, so you have to run like mad just to keep them doing what they're supposed to be doing. And then, of course, that's complicated by your own willful blindness and inadequacy as a repair person, refusal to attend, and all those other things. That's a very classic idea, which we'll return to.

One of the ideas that [Mircea Eliade](#), a famous historian of religions, extracted from a very large corpus of flood myths was the idea that the earth is periodically flattened for two reasons: One is, things fall apart. Straight entropy. I don't remember which law of thermodynamics that is, but it's one of the big laws of thermodynamics. It's one of the top three, man. Things fall apart of their own accord. That's one of the things that we have to contend with. The rate at which things fall apart is sped by the sins of man. That's the other idea. Everyone knows that. Your car breaks down on the highway, and you think, God, that's so inconvenient. You shake your fist at the sky, and then there's part of you, in the back of your mind, that goes, I knew that rattle that I wasn't paying attention to actually signified something. I knew I should have paid attention to it. I didn't, and now I'm in this situation.

I bet you this happens to people two or three times a week. They do something stupid that they know they shouldn't have done and that they told themselves not to do mere seconds before. They know the voice says to not do that...Yea, yea. You do it. You get nailed for it exactly the way that you knew you would get

nailed for it. Then you're hurt doubly, because not only did it fall apart, but you're the idiot that made it fall apart—knowing full well that it was going to fall apart and ignoring it.

That's the idea behind the notion that there are two reasons that things fall apart: thermodynamic entropy and the proclivity of people not to attend to things they know they should attend to. Partly we do that because if a problem emerges, it always announces itself. Unless it's a really, really tiny problem and you're approaching it voluntarily, it always announces itself with negative emotion. That's part of the predator detection circuit. It announces itself in frustration, disappointment, emotional pain, grief, or the paramount one: anxiety. And no wonder, because it's a problem, right? One of the logical responses is to sort of freeze in the face of the problem. But, of course, if it's a problem that has to be addressed and solved, freezing and turning away from it is not a good solution. Since things tend to fall apart on their own accord, just leaving the thing alone is problematic. It's just going to get worse, and not better. That's one of the things that's very annoying about life. So, for example, if you get a warning message from the tax department, the probability that ignoring that will make it go away is zero, right? What will happen, instead, is that the more you ignore it, the larger it will grow. If you ignore it long enough, then it will turn into something large enough to eat you, and that will be the end of you.

I read in Harper's Magazine, at one point, that people would rather be mugged than audited. I believe that, because the mugging...Man, that's over. A couple of minutes of sheer terror, loss of your wallet, and away you walk. An audit... That's like a semi-fatal disease. So that's chaos. The psychological idea is that that's also the chaos that whatever is being represented in Genesis as the spirit of God extracts order out of that at the beginning of time. It's also that which we're constantly contending with as we struggle in the same manner to construct and maintain a habitable world. It's brilliant. When I first put together the relationship between what Eliade called the pre-cosmogonic chaos, the predatory landscape that surrounded our ancestors, and the manner in which we're structured neurologically to respond to all of that, it was like an amazing epiphany.

It's self-evidently the case that the world's too complicated for us to deal with. That's one of the problems that we face on an ongoing basis. And then the question is, well, what do you do about that? If you ignore it, it gets worse, so ignoring it doesn't work. We know what doesn't work, so if ignoring it doesn't work, then attending to it might work. And then I found out with the Egyptians.

...then attending to things from the other side of the eye, for example, that Horus was the god of attention. The same thing happened among Mesopotamians with Marduk and his ring of eyes. What's the way to forestall the catastrophe of things falling apart? The answer to that is by voluntarily attending to them. That slots very nicely into the hero mythology that promotes the idea that if there's a dragon in the neighbourhood, hiding in the basement just makes it grow larger. It's time to go out and confront the damn thing.

The general stories are, well, you might get killed—because it's a dragon—but it's only might, as opposed to definitely will get killed if it happens to attack you at three in the morning, at home, when you're hungover, it's been a bad day, and you don't have your sword and shield at the ready. That is generally what happens to people who avoid things. It's not something that should be recommended. You're screwed both ways. That's one of the things that's so nice about being deeply pessimistic: it's so freeing. Knowing that, sometimes, no matter what you do you're in trouble is a really useful habit to develop. That's a relief. Then you can stop scrabbling around for the way out. There's no way out, man. You can pick wretched death A or slightly less wretched death B. Something like that. I know that's a terrible way of looking at things, but it is extraordinarily useful to understand that many times your choice boils down to picking the least bad option. If that's all you can do, if that's how life is revealing itself to you, it's like, well, more power to you. The least bad option—that's the best you can do. It's good enough, especially compared to the alternative, which is the most bad option.

All right. The fundamental reality of things is complex beyond comprehension. The question is, well, how is it that you manage that? This is where the image of the patriarchal order comes in—in the positive manner, I might point out. In the absence of patriarchal structure, for lack of a better lexicon, there's nothing but chaos. I wouldn't recommend chaos. There's a lot of it, and there isn't that much of you. If you think you can handle it without an a priori structure, and without a sociological structure surrounding you, then you don't know anything at all about human beings. One of the things I've noticed, for example, is that it's unbelievable the degree to which our sanity depends on a functioning sociological structure. Here's why: First of all, you kind of need to know what to do every day. You have to have a routine, because you're an animal. Dogs are a really good example of this. Dogs like routine. They like to be walked the number of times a day that they're supposed to be walked. They get quite sick, very rapidly, if you don't routinize their days. Children are exactly the same

way. You can overdo it, but you still need to know approximately when you should get up. It should be approximately the same every day. You need to know approximately when you're going to eat; you need to know what you're going to eat; you need to know who you're going to eat with; you need to know where to buy your food.

Something like 70 percent of your life consists of those things that you do every single day, that you repeat. Those are often the things that people think about as the trivial elements of their life, but one of the things I would like to point out, if you do the mathematics—I did this with a client of mine that was having a hard time putting his child to bed. They were having a fight every night. I knew by that time that the studies indicate that most parents only spend 20 minutes per day of one-on-one time with their child. The reason for that is that people are busy, and it's actually not that easy to parse out 20 minutes of one-on-one time. It's a lot bloody more time than you think. But that's all there is: 20 minutes. He's spending like 40 minutes per day fighting with his kid, trying to get the kid to go to bed. That's not very entertaining. You think, well, he's just having a scrap with the kid about going to bed. No, no—if it happens every day, it's a catastrophe. So you do the math. We'll say five hours a week for the sake of argument, just to keep it simple. That's 20 hours a month and 240 hours a year. That's six 40-hour work weeks. That guy was basically spending a month and a half of work weeks doing absolutely nothing but having a wretched time fighting with his son, trying to get him to go to bed. Horrible. That's just way too much time to spend doing something like that if you want to actually have a positive relationship with someone. It's just too punishing.

So you need structure and predictability, and you need more of it than you think, just to keep you sane. Now if you're lucky—and maybe a bit odd—you can deviate five percent from the norm, or ten percent from the norm, or something like that—carefully and cautiously, as long as the rest of you is all well ordered in a normative manner. You might be able to get away with that, and you might be able to sustain it across time. People might be able to tolerate you if you do it. Or maybe you'll get really lucky and happen to be creative but reasonably well put-together, and people will actually be happy that there's something idiosyncratic and unique about you. But even under those circumstance, mostly what you want is to have a routine that's disciplined and predictable—and bloody well stick to it. You're going to be way healthier, happier, and saner if you do that.

The psychoanalysts overestimated the degree to which sanity was a consequence



The psychoanalysts overestimated the degree to which sanity was a consequence of being properly structured internally. From the psychoanalytic point of view, you're sort of an ego, and that ego is inside you. Of course, it rests on an unconscious structure, but the purpose of psychoanalysis is to sort out that unconscious structure and the ego on top of it, and to make you a fully-functioning and autonomous individual. But there's a problem with that. The reason that you're sane as a fully-functional and autonomous human being isn't because you've organized your psyche—even though that's important. The reason that you're sane, if you have a well-organized unconscious and ego, is because other people can tolerate having you around for reasonably extensive periods of time, and will cuff you across the back of the head every time you do something so stupid that people will dislike you permanently if you continue.

So what people are doing to each other all the time is broadcasting sanity signals back and forth. You smile at people if they're not only behaving properly, but behaving in a way that you would like to see them continue to behave. You frown at them if they're not; you ignore them if they're not; you shun them; you roll your eyes at them; you manifest a disgust face; you don't listen to them; you interrupt them; you won't cooperate with them; you won't compete with them. You're blasting signals at other people about how to regulate their behaviour so frequently—well, it just makes up all of your social interaction. That's why we face each other, and that's why we have emotional displays on our face. We're looking at each other's eyes, and we know as much as we can about what's going on with each other given that we don't have immediate access to the contents of their consciousness.

Partly what you're doing with your routine is establishing yourself as a credible, reliable, trustworthy, potentially interesting human being who isn't going to do anything too erratic at any moment. Everyone else is tapping you into shape, making sure that that's exactly what you are. That's how you stay sane. People get isolated and start to drift if they don't have a routine. They drift badly, because the world is too complicated for you to keep it organized all by yourself. You just cannot do it. So we outsource the problem of sanity. It's very intelligent that we outsource the problem of sanity, because sanity is an impossibly complex problem. The way that we manage the incredibly complex is we have a very large number of brains working simultaneously on the problem, all the time. It's like a stock market for sanity. I use that definition with purpose. The stock market does the same kind of impossible thing, right? It tries to price things, which is impossible. How many things are there? Like a billion. How in the world do you decide what the price is? You can't decide what the price is—

that's why you have a stock market. In a stock market, as well as a free market, everyone's voting on what the price of everything is, all the time. That's the way we figure it out, because it's technically impossible. That's partly why the stock market explodes now and then, and there's bubbles, and all of that sort of thing.

Anyways, the point is that things are chaotic. In Alice and Wonderland, when Alice goes down the rabbit hole—that's the underworld. Now she's gone into the substructure of being. She meets the Red Queen. The Red Queen is mother nature. Mother nature is running around, and she's yelling "off with their heads! Off with their heads!" Which is, of course, what mother nature does. And she tells Alice, "in my kingdom you have to run as fast as you can just to stay in the same place." That's exactly right. In fact, evolutionary biologists and psychologists picked up on that phrase. They call it [the Red Queen problem](#). The Red Queen problem is that everything's after you all the time and you're not smart enough to do anything about it, or enough about it. That's a permanent, existential problem. How do you deal with that? You've got a biological structure. So your embodiment is part of the solution to the problem. And then you're inculturated, and because you're inculturated, you're taught a lot of things that you need to know. But mostly what you're taught is how to communicate with other people in an acceptable manner. Once you can communicate with people in an acceptable manner, then you can outsource your problems constantly, which you're doing constantly.

We're in this continual dynamic exchange of problem solving. So if you're a socialized person, that's what you get access to, and that's something to know if you're going to have kids. I mentioned this, I think, in a previous lecture. The purpose of being a parent for very young children is to make your children exceptionally socially desirable by the age of four. If you can do that, they're set. Everyone wants them around. As soon as everybody wants them around, they want to play with them; they want to cooperate with them; they want to compete with them. The doors open, and they stay sane because they've got all sorts of people who actually like them, who are helping them out. So your goal is to make them as socially acceptable and desirable as you possibly can. That doesn't mean you render them obedient without spirit. That's a tyrant's mode of enforcing social acceptability. It's like, never do anything wrong. Well, that's not any way to—I mean, that's a good piece of advice, but it's missing the other half, which is to do a bunch of things that are right so that people are thrilled to have you around. That's what you want to do as a parent, as well as inculcating the order.

In this little diagram I indicated that there's God the Father with the sun behind him, and he's ruling over this walled city. He's like the meta-spirit of the walled city. It's a brilliant image. It's the collective spirit of the city. That's another way of thinking about it. It's the collective spirit of the city across time, or the collective spirit of the force that built and maintained the city across time—even better. That's associated with the sun, because it's associated with enlightenment, illumination, and all of those things that we associate with higher consciousness and vision. It's a brilliant image. And then I overlaid this. Of course, the patriarchal aspect of existence can become tyrannical, and it does that quite regularly. It's one of the existential dangers of human civilization: civilization is a medication for chaos, but it can spin out of control in and of itself and become its own sort of problem, which is like a hyper-order problem, generally, which then produces a chaos problem.

Every solution carries within it certain problems, because no solution is perfect. You have to keep things in balance. It's one of the reasons that I'm really... Let's call it irritated about the postmodernists. They keep yammering about the patriarchy, and it's very, very annoying. It's self-evident that social structures are tyrannical. It's like, that's not news, folks. That's obvious. But that's not all they are. It's a reduction of the entire complex solution, let's say, to a unidimensional problem. It's just tyranny. It's like, no. Actually, it's not just tyranny. If you spent six months somewhere that was just tyranny, you'd know the difference very, very rapidly. That doesn't mean that everyone doesn't give up a pound or two—or ten, or twenty—of flesh to participate even in a society that's as free as a Western society is. We all get crushed and moulded by the tyrannical force of social convention. But, at least in principle, the benefit is worth the cost. It's also up to you to make sure you don't sacrifice more to the group than you should. You can start to tell if you're sacrificing more to the group than you should because you start to become resentful of other people. That's part of the psychological mechanism that's informing you of that. So it's up to you to fight against the overarching pressure for conformity and to retain your individual logos, but that's sort of your problem. The group wants you to behave. Now if you could behave and be creatively productive, so much the better, but that's pretty damn rare. The group generally tends to settle just for behave. There's a tyrannical element of that, but what the hell's the alternative? Our society is based on consensus, and the consensus is based on a certain sacrifice of individuality, even though individuality is absolutely necessary as a revitalizing force for the society. It's a very tough thing to manage properly.

A more complex diagram showing hierarchical social structures as a series of concentric circles.

Anyways, you have your physiological structure as your first line of ordering in relationship to chaos. Your body presents you with the world in a certain way. And then the second line of defense is something like the sociological structures that you inhabit. We could call those the competency hierarchy. Something like that—and thank God for them. Maybe you're going to be able to specialize in one or two things in your life, but there's 300 things you need to know. If it's just you, you'll be doing your genius level mathematics while your bathtub is leaking all over your bathroom floor. That's not so good, so you can call a plumber. Hooray for that. We tend to cooperate to keep chaos under control. We tend to cooperate to keep order under control. That's the political dialog, right? We maintain the culture to keep chaos under control, and we balance the culture properly to keep the culture under control. That way we get to live reasonably peacefully, reasonably productively, for a reasonable amount of time, and that's the best that we can do. We should have gratitude when that's working. The default condition of things is that not only do they not work very well, they work worse and worse over time, all by themselves. Any time anything is working you should just be amazed by it.

So what does the frame look like? Well, I think it looks something like this. As far as I can tell, this is the barebones of a variety of things. It's a barebone story; it's a barebone conceptual framework; it's a barebone [dasein](#), to speak in Heideggerian terms. It's the barebones world that you live in. You're always in one of these worlds. There's no getting out of them. You can move from one to another, but you're always in a world like this. This is the world that you're in. You're somewhere, because you have to be somewhere. Now you might not know where that is, which means that the somewhere that you are is chaotic, in which case you need to go over your past in great detail and figure out where you are. You're lost, and the problem with being lost is that you don't know where to go. The problem with not knowing where to go is there's a million places you could go, and a million places is too many places for you to go without dying. So being lost is not good. You need to know where you are.

One of the things that my partners and I built online is this program called [Past Authoring](#) that helps people lay out the narrative of their past, break their life down into six stages—we call them epochs—and then to identify the emotionally significant moments in each epoch and write out what happened negatively, what happened positively, what the consequences were, what you derive from it, perhaps what you could have done differently, and perhaps what you learned from it—all of that so that you can zero in on determining precisely

where it is that you are right now. People are often loathe to do that, because they actually don't want to know. They'd rather be spread out in a sort of half blind manner, in a fog, hoping that the place they're at is better than it really is and deluding themselves by remaining vague. They'd rather do that than figure out that they are right here, right now with these specific problems. But it's actually better to do that, because if you have a set of specific problems, and you've really narrowed them down and specified them, then you can probably start fixing them.

You can start fixing them in micro ways, bit by bit, but there's no way you can do that without knowing where you are. It's impossible. You can kind of tell if you don't know where you are. It's quite straightforward. If you are haunted by reveries of the past, for events that are older than approximately 18 months, if they continue to come up in your mind, over and over—in your dreams, over and over—you haven't extracted the world out from your past experiences. The potential is still trapped in the past. To confront the potential means to confront the dragon of the past. Of course, that's terrifying. It can seriously be terrifying. For example, maybe you're vague, ill-formed, and ill-defined because you were abused very badly when you were a child. Maybe you were abused by a family member when you were four years old. Something like that. That's generally who does the abusing. That just makes it worse. And then what that means is that you've had a direct encounter with malevolent evil, but you have an implicit hypothesis of malevolent evil that's plaguing you. It's still there, trapped in representational structure. As an adult, you're now faced with the necessity of articulating that fully before you have any chance whatsoever of freeing yourself from it.

So that's no joke. Lots of times people have to go into the past—that's what the psychoanalysts do—and say, look, here's something that came along and just bloody well knocked me over. It isn't even that I repressed it... We won't talk about Freud's errors. Freud was a genius, so we'll just leave him alone. But sometimes it's not repression. It's just that terrible things happen to people at such a young age that there isn't a bloody chance in hell that they can figure out why they happened, or what to do with them, or what they mean. And then you can carry that with you.

It's like your body encounters the world in stages. It happens very rapidly. It can extend over years, but the initial stages happen very rapidly. For example, if you're walking down a road and you hear a loud noise behind you, you go like this. That's a predator defense response, by the way. You crouch down. That's to

ums. That's a predator defense response, by the way. You crouch down. That's to stop something from jumping on your back and getting at your neck easily. That's like a few hundred milliseconds. It's really fast, or even faster than that—and it better be, because something like a snake, we'll say, can nail you just right now, so you better be fast. But it's low resolution. It's like, danger-snake, or danger-predatory-cat. It's that fast. And then you can unravel that and categorize it, but that takes time.

You do that with emotion, and then you do it with cognition. You can do that with longterm thinking. Maybe you've encounter someone specifically malevolent and predatory at work—that happens to people a lot—operating as a destructive bully who seems to have no positive function whatsoever, and who is only living that out. And then you don't know what to do about it. You're in prey mode...I don't mean this kind of mode, although that would help, too. I mean that you're acting like a prey animal, and then you have this terribly complex thing to decompose, which is, what the hell's up with this person? Why are they making my life miserable? What is it about me that allows them to make my life miserable? That's a nasty little road to walk down. You're stuck with having to decompose it. Maybe you can't—maybe formulating an explicit philosophy of good and evil to deal with something malevolent in your environment actually just happens to be beyond you. That could easily be it. It's certainly the case for people who are young, and it's the case for plenty of adults, as well. It's no simple thing to manage. Soldiers who have post-traumatic stress disorder often have to do it. They've encountered terrible things. Maybe they've done them, or ran into them. They need to update their moral model of the world, or they end up in something closely approximating hell.

So you need to know where you are. That's what this is: where are you. So you're navigating. You're a sailor on the ocean. That's what you are: you're a mobile creature. You're going from point A to point B all the time. You're not sitting there glued to a rock like some brainless sea creature. There's a funny little creature called a [hydra](#)—a very simple little creature. It has a brain and swims around in its juvenile stage. But then, when it turns into an adult, it latches itself to a rock and promptly digests its brain. If you're just sitting on a rock, and you're not moving, you don't need a brain. But that's not our issue.

We're zipping around in the world. We're navigating agents. To navigate, there are two things you need to know. The first is where the hell are you—exactly, precisely, razor-sharp. What's good about you and what's bad about you, by your own reckoning. You can ask other people, but this is a game you play

yourself. I'm taking stock. What is it that's ok about me? And what needs some work? You gotta watch to not be too self-critical when you're doing that, because that can just be another kind of flaw. Next is, ok, where are you going? What's your destination? That's what the frame is. You can do that in a very sophisticated way. You do that by thinking consciously about who it is that you are in an articulated manner, where you want to go, why, and how you're going to get there. People hardly ever do that. That's come as such an absolute shock to me, as an educator.

One of the other programs in this suite of programs is the [Future Authoring program](#). I started developing it in my [Maps of Meaning class](#), which is where some of this material is from. I got students to write about their past. It's like, ok, we're talking about stories, so let's tell your story. Who are you? How did you get here? And what are you now? That usually helps people put things to rest, although it's quite stressful while you're doing it. Stress goes up when you're doing it, and maybe you feel miserable for a couple of weeks, and then stress goes down, and it stays down. That's also why people don't do it, because who the hell wants to have their stress go up. But if it's temporary, it's a sacrifice.

So then the next issue is, well, where are you going? Students that have been in the education system for 14 years—high-end students, most of them—not once in their whole bloody life did anyone ever get them to sit down for like a day and say, all right, justify your existence. Well, seriously. It's like, here you are in university; you're taking a bunch of courses; you've got some sort of vague career plan. Defend the damn thing, since you're going to go live it, and everything. You're staking everything on it. What's your damn plan? Why are you so convinced that it's not the plan of a babbling fool? Because if you haven't thought about it, then it is. And if you really want to go out there and live that out...

One of the things that Carl Jung said was that you're in a story whether you know it or not. And then he made two nice comments about that: If it's someone else's story, you're probably going to get a bit part, and it might not be the one you want. And if it's a story that you don't know, it might be one with a really bad ending—or maybe it's just bad, period, with a worse ending. If you don't know what the story you're living out is, maybe that's the one. Maybe you got that from your mother; you got it from your grandmother; you got it from your aunt, or God only knows where you picked it up, because you pick up things like mad. That's what human beings are like. Maybe you're living a malevolent tragedy unconsciously. And then one thing you might ask yourself is, well, how

tragedy unconsciously. And then one thing you might ask yourself is, well, how wretched, miserable, and futile is your life? And you might say, yea, 70 percent on each count. Well, then you're probably unconsciously living out a malevolent tragedy—it's either that or 70 percent of the whole universe hates you.

Anyways, we got students to start writing in detail about—not what they wanted. It's not a career thing, because that's the closest people usually get. They have a career plan. It's like, no, no; it's not a career plan. That's peripheral—important but peripheral. It's like, all right, you got three years, man. You're going to live them, anyways. Devote those three years to setting the world up around you so that it's the best it could possibly be for you—as if you cared for yourself. Well, what would that look like? Let's say, just for the sake of argument, if you figured out where you were, that you could have what would be best for you. Well, what is that? I bet you never asked. People don't ask, so life comes at them like random snakes, and they sort of fend them off. And life goes by, and things don't work out the way people expected them to.

A huge part of that is that you didn't know where they were, because they wouldn't look, or didn't know that they should look. Ignorance and willful blindness, right? Two great catastrophes. And they never figured out where they wanted to go, or why. Now there's a problem with figuring out where you want to go. The problem is that you make your conditions for failure clear to yourself. People don't like that. If you keep yourself in the fog, then you can't tell when you screwed up. That isn't so good because you're still screwing up; you're just too self-blind to notice. Although, in the short term that's less painful. If you make your criteria for success razor-sharp, then you know every time you screw up. But that's great, because then you could fix it. You could repair either the behavioural inadequacy or the conceptual inadequacy that you're using as a tool in that situation. Or maybe you could adjust your damn plan. Either way, you can fix it.

Ok, so you're living in one of these bloody things. It seems to me that you might as well make it the best one you could live in, because you don't have anything better to do. If you don't do that, if you don't do it consciously—and this is what the psychoanalysts pointed out—you'll just act out the stories that the innumerable, quasi-autonomous subsystems that make you up generate impulsively. You know that because you watch yourself over two weeks and you think, Jesus—I did a lot of stupid things over the last two weeks. And you think, why? And it's because you're a collection of somewhat random, quasi-autonomous personality units. Lacking a leader, they're just going to fire off



whenever they want. First you're hungry, then you're thirsty, then you want to go to bed with your wife, then you want to sleep in, then you want to tell your boss off, then you want to curse at the guy that cuts you off in traffic. You're kinda like a two year old. It's one emotional frame after another, vying for dominance. There's no overarching hierarchy, and there's no king at the top.

We already talked about pyramids of competence. What's supposed to be at the top is something to bring all those things together. We understand this neurologically. I'll show you some of that in a little bit. We understand this neurologically—how this maps, in some sense, right onto the neural structure of your being. You want to put something in control. The thing that you should put in control is the bloody thing that pays attention and learns. Everything else in the hierarchy should be subordinate to the thing that pays attention and learns. You could think, well, that's the message of the idea of logos. That's for sure, because logos is partly attention and partly communication. You learn a lot by communicating with others.

Ok, so you need to know where you are—just like your GPS, which is about the closest thing we have to an intelligent cybernetic system. Those bloody things are pretty smart. They know where you are; they know where you're going, and if you go off course, they recalculate your route. Those things are damn near alive. That's so close to intelligence. You can tell that because they act intelligently. They solve problems, continually. This is a cybernetic model, by the way. Cybernetic models were the models on which the GPS systems were based. It's not accidental. You need to know where you are, and you need to know where you're going. And then the next thing you need to know is how it is that you're going to act, move your body, propel yourself through time and space to transform this into that. And then we can make that a little bit more complex, because it's a bit too simple. So it isn't exactly that you live in one of these: it's that you live in a nested hierarchy of these. You can think of this as your own internal patriarchy. That's a good way of thinking about it. Maybe it could be a tyrant, or maybe it could be something that gives you security and functional autonomy, and hopefully that's the one you go for, but it's a battle. A little bit of tyranny exists in everyone. So at the very highest level of analysis—that would be the overarching story—maybe you think, I'd like to be a good person, or a successful person, or a famous person. I think good's probably better, because you can come up with the definition of good as long as it doesn't annoy other people too badly. Otherwise they would just get in your way, and that won't be helpful. So you have to negotiate it. But let's say you're a good person. That's sort of the story at the top of hierarchy. And then you could

person. That's sort of the story at the top of hierarchy. And then you could decompose that into your primary roles. Maybe you're a good parent; maybe you're a good employer; maybe you're a good employee; maybe you're a good sibling; maybe you're a good child. Those are major roles that you have in your life. And so you'd say that a good person is what's good about you across all of those roles. It's a higher-order abstraction from something more concrete.

You can take the good parent role and say, well, what is it that constitutes a good parent? And you might say, well, a good parent—this isn't exhaustive, obviously—has a good job and takes care of his or her family. And then you might say, well, what does it mean to take care of your family? And then you might say that means that you can cook the odd meal—not too odd, hopefully—and you can play with a baby. Well, how do you play with a baby? Well, you play peekaboo with a baby, or you tickle a baby. There's a cool shift, there, because this is all articulated and conceptual, right? Right down to this level. Then, all of a sudden, it's your body. Because how do you play peekaboo with your baby? You don't have like a chat about how you play peekaboo with a baby, right? You go like this. It's quite fun.

You could even do it with older people. They even smile about it, right? Dad's gone, and the baby's all shocked to death about that. Where'd he go? Oh, look—he's back. The baby is playing with the reliability of the world, so it's a real intense game for a baby. It's like, oh no, Dad's gone. Oh, look, he showed up again! Oh no, he's gone. And then dad's smiling to indicate that those brief flashes into nonexistence aren't existentially terrifying beyond capacity. The point is, if you're playing peekaboo with a baby, you're not thinking anymore. It's not in the realm of articulation or abstraction. It's actually something that you're doing with your body. So to me, this is a nice multi-stage solution to the [mind-body problem](#). What happens is that it's articulated and conceptual at the higher-order of abstraction, but if you decompose it sufficiently, you end up with an actual action. The action involves the movement of musculature. It's not something conceptual. One of the things that's really cool about this hierarchy is that it has educational lessons. One of the things you want to do if you're trying to teach someone something, even yourself, is to specify the thing that needs doing at the highest resolution possible. So I'll give you just a brief example. I may be repeating this, but it doesn't matter.

Say you've got a three year old kid, and their room is chaos. Monsters are going to be coming out from under the bed in no time flat unless that room gets some order in it. You tell the kid, clean up the room. It's a mess. You leave and come

back, and the kid's like throwing legos everywhere. They're not cleaning up. And then you think, that's a bad kid. That's a bad theory, because you're going right from here to here. If you want to have a good fight with someone and destroy them, then that's what you do. You don't bother with the subtleties down here. You just go right for the jugular: you're a bad, stupid kid; you've always been that way, and there's not a chance of teaching you anything. That way you can nail the past, present, and the future with the same insult. You've always been a terrible person; there's no teaching you, and your future's going to be exactly the same way. The only thing the person can do if you do that to them is hit you, because that's it; there's no coming back from that. You've boxed them completely in. So if you want to have a really unproductive argument, you go right for this: past, present, and future. You're not a good person. Demolish their entire conceptual structure and expose them completely naked to chaos. It's like, great; you won the argument. It's not a good thing to do to your longterm partner, let's say, unless you want them terrified out of their skull and their attitude towards you characterized by nonstop, extreme resentment. It's probably not going to do your love life a hell of a lot of good, for example.

So with the three year old, you pick the level of analysis at which they're actually functioning. This is something you can do if you pay attention to a kid. Lots of adults won't pay attention to children because they're terrified of them—they're terrified that they'll do something wrong with them, or that the kid won't like them, or some damn thing. All you have to do to get a kid to like you is pay attention to the kid for like two seconds and the kid will instantly like you. Attention is the ultimate currency for children. They need adult attention, because adults know way more than kids. They love attention. All you have to do is pay attention to them, and they will like you instantly. So you tell the kid, you see that teddy bear? The kid goes yes. Then you've established that the child has mastered the art of perceiving a teddy bear. They can say yes. It's a complicated thing, man. A six month old isn't going to do that. A three year old has got the whole teddy bear identification subroutine automatized. Teddy bear—yes. Can you pick it up? Yes. Pat, pat, pat. Good work. Do you see the hole on that shelf? Yes. Can you put the teddy bear in that hole? Yes. Go over and do that. Pat, pat, pat. Great! Ok, now we'll do thing number two, thing number three.

You're building up the micro routines of cleaning up the room from the bottom up. You're building it into their body, because you're starting with the things they've already automatized and building upwards towards abstraction. How

many micro routines are there to clean up your room? 200? A lot, but not an infinite number. So you teach them all the micro routines, and then you can say, run set of micro routines, which means clean up your room. And then they can do it; they know what it means. But you do the building from the bottom up. When you're arguing with someone that you live with and hypothetically love, what you want to do is assume stupidity before you assume total malevolence. That's a good rule of thumb for establishing peace. So maybe if your partner won't do something, well, maybe there's something going on up here, but you might want to assume to begin with that they actually just don't know how to do it. You need to decompose it.

Maybe there's a way you want to be greeted when you come home. You're going to come home every day, probably, and maybe that's a five-minute interaction, or a ten-minute interaction. That's an hour a week, four hours a month, 50 hours a year, or one solid work week of coming home interactions. All you have to do is get 50 interactions like that right and you've got your relationship sorted out. That's something that's really worth thinking about. You just don't have that much time, right? Get the meals sorted out. That's about five hours a day. Get your sleeping time arrangement sorted out. Get the fundamental interactions that you repeat with your partner worked out voluntarily and negotiated. You're going to cover 80 percent of your life that way, and then it can just run as a routine. That's really helpful. If you don't do that consciously—especially because our roles have fragmented and most of the traditional roles have disappeared. Nobody knows who the hell's supposed to do what. In the kitchen, for example, nobody does anything except bitch, fight, and make wretched meals, or buy fast food, or something like that. The alternative to that catastrophic failure or continual resentment and fighting is to rebuild the structures from the bottom up using consensus and negotiation.

You could think of that as the patriarchal structure. That's a good one. It's partly psychological, because these are things you do as a person, but it's also partly political, economic, and sociological. While you're doing each of these things, you're also doing them in a way that's, hopefully, not just socially acceptable but actually socially desirable. That's the decomposition. It's not that your belief systems keep chaos at bay. It's not that abstract. It's that if you do things right, then terrible things happen to you with less frequency. It's partly psychological, because maybe you don't fight as much; maybe you're not anxious as much; maybe you're not as depressed. But a lot of it is just practical. If your kid doesn't leave his skateboard on the stairs, then you don't break your neck as often, and that's not just psychological. That's a good thing to not break your neck so

that's not just psychological. That's a good thing, to not break your head so often. This structure isn't merely something that keeps things as bay psychologically.

Here's another look at a hierarchy of narrative—the structure that keeps chaos at bay. This is, maybe, the hierarchy that I engage in when I'm writing. I'm doing all of these things at the same time. That's what's cool. What are you doing when you write an essay? That's a hard question, right? It's a vast and important question. That's the first thing you should do if you're writing an essay. You're paying attention to the words, phrases, sentences, and to the relationship of the sentences within the paragraphs, the relationship between paragraphs within the essay, then the essay's relevance to the class, and the class's relevance to your life. The essay bleeds out across your entire life. So if I'm writing something... Well, obviously, at the highest resolution level of analysis, I'm actually moving my fingers on the keyboard and moving my eyes back and forth on the screen. That's where the mind meets the body.

But then I'm trying to formulate a sentence, and so I try to think up a good sentence that's nailing what I am trying to formulate, and then I try to pick that apart. I do that in a bunch of ways. I take the sentence, and I put it on another page, and then I write like 10 different variants of the sentence, seeing if I can get a better variant. Then I try to think of ways that it's a stupid sentence, to see if I can put a pry bar underneath it and loosen it up. If I can't manage that, then I keep the sentence that I've got. Then I do that with 10 sentences in a paragraph, and I make sure the sentences are all arranged properly in the paragraph, the same way, by rewriting a bunch of different variants of it, trying to get the word right, and the phrase right, and the sentence right, and the sentence order right, and the paragraph order right. I can tell when it's right enough because I can't make it any better. That doesn't mean it's right. It just means that I can't improve it.

So I get to the point that, if I'm writing a paragraph and I can't tell if the variant is any better—and it might be worse—then I'm done. I've hit the limit of my intellectual capacity; and it's time to move on. But that isn't like the essay that I'm writing. There is a boundary that's tightly drawn around the essay, because there's a reason that I'm writing the damn essay, and that would be, well, I'm trying to write a whole manuscript—hopefully I'm trying to address an important problem. Why would I be doing it, otherwise? That would be kind of pointless. Maybe that's part of my role as a scientist, and that's a subset of my role as a professor, and then that's a subset of my role as a productive citizen,

and then that's a subset of my role of someone who confronts the unknown.

That's why the logos is the thing that's at the top of the hierarchy. That's how the hierarchy should be structured for everything else. You have a structure, and you think, what should the structure be subordinate to? The answer should be something like, the structure should be subordinate to the process that generates the structure, or the structure should be subordinate to the process that generates and maintains the structure. Obviously. How could it be any other way, unless the structure's perfect? In which case you dispense with the thing that generates it and improves it, but then you're a totalitarian. It's like, hey, we got the answer. No. You don't. People are still suffering, and they're still dying. You don't have the damn answer. Maybe you have an answer that means there isn't quite as much suffering and dying as there could be, but there's plenty of road to be travelled, yet. So it all makes perfect sense that all of this should be nested within this. I think of it as the highest order of moral striving. And then that also gives you a moral hierarchy. That's the most important thing. You do that with attention and honest speech. That's how you do that. You don't sacrifice that to any of this, because if you do, then you're hurting your soul.

There's this idea in the New Testament that the sin against the Holy Ghost is the one sin that can't be forgiven. No one knows what the hell that means. Maybe it doesn't mean anything. But I think this is what it means: because this process generates all this, if you violate that process, then there's no hope for you, because that's the process by which you improve yourself and everything else, too. So if you decide you're not going to engage in that, it's like, well, there's no fixing that. You've blown apart your relationship with the thing that does the fixing.

That's how you keep chaos at bay. Part of that is structural. You know how to do these things, more or less. It's part of your skill set if you happen to be a writer. You could build one of these for a plumber. It doesn't make any difference, really, although the outside thing should be the same, which is, I think, partly why there is the assumption in the Judeo-Christian tradition that people are fundamentally equal before God. What that means is that everyone, regardless of their particularities as individuals, has that as their highest order of function. They do it in whatever manner they can manage. That's, maybe, the most extraordinarily valuable sociological, political, and economic function. That's why people are valuable. We have this faculty to continually generate improvements to the structure that we jointly inhabit. Great! That gives us a fundamental unity at the highest order of analysis with the room for as much

diversity as you could possibly manage. It actually turns out that the more the substructure's different, the better, because then you can be doing something different than me. That would be good, because if we're doing the same thing, then it's just duplication of labor. If we could agree on the higher-order principle and then specialize at the lower order levels, it's like...That's...You get to have your cake and eat it, too. That doesn't happen very often.

Another rule of thumb is, if you're trying to solve a problem, solve it at the highest resolution level possible before you dare move up the hierarchy. As you move up the abstraction hierarchy, the probability that you'll make a catastrophic error while attempting to fix the problem radically increases. Abstraction is very, very powerful, so you want to be very careful. We saw that when the mortgage market crashed. The reason it crashed was because of a strange use of derivatives. Derivates are like higher-order abstractions in the financial world. Derivatives give you tremendous financial leverage and power with huge risk. The upside is massive, absolutely massive, because you can multiply your earnings, but the downside is complete bloody catastrophe. I would say that an intelligent, conservative ethos solves the problem at the highest and most local level of resolution. It's safer, and it's more likely to actually produce a solution.

Now you're in your plan. We're simplifying again to one little map, but all those other things are nested in there. You encounter things as you're moving from point A to point B. People think that what they encounter are objects, but that's not the case. First of all, most of the things that you encounter are actually other people, and they're not objects; they're too damn complex. Even apart from the social world, the things that you encounter aren't objects. They seem to be something more like tools or obstacles. I don't mean that we see objects and turn them into tools or obstacles. I mean that we see tools and obstacles. The world transforms itself into three things when you array yourself towards a goal: things that get in the way of the goal—those are the things you don't like—things that facilitate your movement towards the goal—those are things that you like—and irrelevant things. Mostly you want irrelevant things, because there's just too damn many things.

The category of irrelevant is one you really like. Most of everything is irrelevant if you have a good plan. A few things are good—because they move you forward—and some other things are not so good. You want to go around the not so good things, if you can manage that—unless you like to run head forth into

brick walls, which is not particularly...It's a learning experience, but I wouldn't repeat it too many times. You want the world to array itself as a set of tools. What happens is that you have this perceptual system that's mediated by dopamine. It's the same system that cocaine activates, or methamphetamine, or the drugs that people really like to take. It's the dopaminergic system that responds with positive emotion to indications that you've encountered something that will facilitate your movement towards a goal. That's really important to know. People tend to think they're happy because they achieve goals. That's not true, because as soon as you achieve a goal then you have a problem, which is, what's the next goal? That's actually a big problem. You encounter that as soon as you graduate from university, for example. I made this joke before. On graduation day, you're like king of the undergraduate hierarchy. On the day after, you're an unemployed, potential Starbucks employee. So obviously the accomplishment, per se, as a source of reward is problematic.

When you accomplish, you run the frame to its end, and then you have the problem of needing a new frame. That's a problem. But if you're encountering things that will move you along your way, then that's great. That's where you get your positive motivation. That's so much worth thinking about. You could think about that for a year, and that wouldn't even be enough to think about it. Here's what it means: It means, in some sense, that the Buddhists are right with their claim about [maya](#), which means that people live in an illusion. What they mean by that is, well, you have goal—whatever your goal is—and that goal gives relevance to the world. You could change the relevance of the world in a snap just by changing your goal. You can do that. Then you think, well, it's sort of an illusion, because you can just change it. Now, you don't want to push that line of argumentation too far, because even if the specific point can be changed, the fact that you're in one of these frames cannot be changed.

So you have to be in a frame, although you get to pick the frame. There's still an absolute there, which is that you have to be in a frame. That is not a trivial absolute. It's a very major absolute. Then you think, ok, all of your positive emotion is going to be experienced in relationship to the goal. Then we think, well, we could use some positive emotion. It's a good thing. Positive emotion inhibits anxiety, disappointment, frustration, and pain. It does all that. Technically it does that. That's why a football player with a broken thumb who wants to score a touchdown can go out there and play the football game, even though it's kind of an arbitrary goal. It's like, really? You're going to go out there and risk your hand to fire a pig skin through some poles? Well you could say the same sort of cynical thing about most of the things that people do but



say the same sort of cynical thing about most of the things that people do, but you can't say the cynical thing about the fact that they have to do things. So you have a point; you have your aim; you have your ambition. That's what turns the world into a potentially positive place. Here's the kicker—this is so cool—the higher the aim, the more the positive emotion. You think, why should I bother? Why should I bother doing something lofty and difficult? Because it's worth it.

The alternative is stupid suffering. Really. You don't need a framework in order to suffer. You can just lay there day after day and suffer, right? That's easy! That's the default condition. If you don't have a lofty ambition, then you suffer miserably. The reason for that is that life is really complex, short, finite, full of suffering, and beyond you. You can just lay there and think about that, and it's horrible. That's not helpful. It's just not useful. People often say life is meaningless. It's like, no. It's not. That's wrong. If it was meaningless, that'd be easy. You could just sit there and do nothing, and it wouldn't matter. It would be like you're a lobotomized sheep. It's just irrelevant. But that isn't what happens. That isn't what people mean when they say that life has no meaning. What they mean is, I'm suffering stupidly and intensely, and I don't know what to do about it. Well, the suffering is meaningful. It's just not the kind of meaning you want. So how do you get out of that? You note the baseline of suffering, which is very, very, very, very high. And then you say to yourself, ok, I need to do something that justifies that. That's not so easy. The baseline for suffering is high. If you're going to make something of yourself, so that it's worthwhile to exist in the world, then you have to aim at something that's so well structured that you can say, yea, earthquakes, cancer, death of my family, disillusion of my goals, ultimate futility of life, and the heat death of the universe—hey, it doesn't matter. It's worth it.

Here's another complicating factor. So I said, well, there's three things that you can run into when you're going about your goal. I would say that if you're going to form a goal, or you're going to form a plan, look about three to five years out into the future. Beyond that you get something called combinatorial explosion, and it means that there's so many variables that you just can't predict. So there's not that much point looking out 20 years, because what the hell do you know what's going to happen in 20 years? Nothing. Maybe you can chart a course to three years, five years, something like that. That's not a bad segment of time to consider. And then consider what your life would have to be like in order for it to be worthwhile for you—knowing, also, what you're going to be like if it isn't worthwhile for you. What you're going to be like if it isn't worthwhile for you is Cain. That's what you're like, because that's what that story's about. Abel's the

guy who has a goal and is making the proper sacrifices. Cain is the person for whom, by his own fault, things aren't working out for him. The default for not doing this is something like building resentment, bitterness, with an underlying...what would you call it...flavour-enhancer of murderous resentment. Something like that—which you will act out in the world, and which people act out in the world all the time. And it's no wonder, because without something lofty pulling you along, then the baseline is stupid suffering. If you take a dog, chain it in the backyard, put a collar on it that's too tight so it chafes all the time, and it can't even bark, there's just dirt around it, and it's too goddamn hot out in the sun, and maybe you don't get it enough water, it's not going to be a very happy dog. Its basic condition is misery. Well, the same applies to people.

All right. You've all probably watched Pinocchio or know about it. One of the things that happens in Pinocchio is when Geppetto decides that he wants his puppet to be a genuine, autonomous being, he wishes upon a star. It's a very strange thing, but everybody just swallows it, because we don't notice when we're swallowing things that are completely preposterous. An animated puppeteer wishes on a star and his puppet is going to become real. Everyone nods their heads and goes, yea, that makes sense. It's like, no. It doesn't make any sense at all, and it doesn't matter. It doesn't make the sort of sense that we normally associate with sense. It makes a kind of meta-sense, and everybody understands it. This is what Geppetto's doing. He's elevating his eyes above the horizon—out of the realm of the worldly, let's say, to the transcendent. You can see the transcendent spread above you in the heaven that arches over us. It's close enough for our purposes. There's a star, there. The star is something that's eternal and shines in the darkness. Geppetto makes an agreement with the transcendent. He says, look, I'm willing to do whatever it takes for my creation to become autonomous. That's exactly the situation that you want to set up for yourself.

You have to figure out what star you're going to orient yourself by. You have to ask yourself, if you had the choice to make your life worth living, what's your price? What do you need? Find out, first of all! You just ask. You'll tell yourself. You'll be afraid, because you'll think, ah, I'll never get that. Well, lower your sights a little bit, then. Don't ask for an 80 foot super yacht in like six months. That just means you're stupid. First of all, it's not going to make you happy. It's just not. It's not wise. You're supposed to be asking yourself this question like you're someone you care about. So imagine you're talking to some 12 year old kid that you kind of like. It wouldn't be so bad if this 12 year old kid had a

kid that you kind of like. It wouldn't be so bad if this 12 year old kid had a decent life. The universe wouldn't mind if you had a decent life—if there was a little less suffering on your part, especially if you didn't foist it off on other people. If there's a little less suffering on your part and you made things a little better everywhere you went, the universe would probably be ok with that. I think you could get away with it if you were sort of quiet about it. So ask yourself.

Once you've established your target, you know where you are, and then you know what's good for you, because that moves you along. That happens at a perceptual level. You don't have to think about it anymore. The experimental literature on that is already quite clear. For example, if I specify that podium as the target for my action, then I'm happy when I'm walking towards it, because there it is, and everything is cooperating really nicely. And if I specify going to the exit sign—that you guys can't see—that this is an obstacle in the front of, then as soon as I specify that, then that's an annoying obstacle. That's precognitive. It happens instantaneously. It really is the case that your being manifests itself inside these frames. What's so cool about that is you can change the frame. That doesn't mean you can like juggle planets or anything like that, but it does give you quite a scope of...Untrammelled action within the world. If the frame isn't working out, then you can tweak it. Sometimes you have to make a major adjustment in it. Whatever. You don't have to stick to the damn thing like it's the ideology that you're going to die for. It's a tentative plan; it's a work in progress. With the Future Authoring Program, one of the things I recommend for people is that they should do it badly. You're not going to get it right, anyways. But a reasonable plan is way better than no plan. Plus, a reasonable plan is a plan that has built into it the processes that will enable the plan to get better as you implement it. So you just start with a reasonable plan. You don't have to worry about whether it's correct. It's not correct. That doesn't matter. It's better than nothing, and that's the issue.

Ok, so you've got the world parsed up into things that are making you happy when you look at them, things that get in the way that produce negative emotion, and then a whole host of irrelevant things. Almost everything's irrelevant. That's where all the chaos is hiding: the chaos is hiding in what's irrelevant. That's a very interesting observation. Since the chaos is virtually infinite, it's a real question: where the hell do you put it? Well, you put it in what you ignore. And you can ignore it as long as it isn't actively interfering with your movement forward, and you can assume that it doesn't matter—that it isn't matter. Same thing.

All right, so here's the kicker. There's one more class of things that you can run into along the way. This is where the chaos breaks through. So let's say you're moving from point A to point B, and something that you don't expect occurs. It gets in the way. Let's say that you're living with someone, and maybe you kind of like them. You're not married, so you don't like them that much, because otherwise you'd ask them to marry you. And so a quarter of you is looking for something better, and three quarters of you is half satisfied. Something like that. Because we're ambivalent about such things. And then you discover, or the person announces, that they've been having an affair. How are you supposed to respond emotionally to that? Well, the part of you that wasn't all that committed to the relationship is kind of exhilarated by that, and then the three quarters of you that's half satisfied is hurt. You're going to exploit the hurt part, for sure, in the ensuing discussions, and not mention the, oh, that's kind of exciting that you've betrayed me that way. But the point is that that's a hole.

You have a structure of thin ice that you're skating on. Now, there's a hole in it. We don't even know how deep the hole is, but you know there's a hole. You're anxious about it—although maybe also a little bit excited, because God only knows what's down there. But you don't know what to do with that hole. It could be that the whole relationship was a facade, and that all your relationships have been facades, and that the reason for that is because you're so damn shallow that it's impossible for you to have a relationship that isn't just a facade. That's partly because you don't pay any attention to other people, and it's also partly because you're malevolent and selfish. That's a nasty thing to discover—or maybe that's the sort of person that you're attracting, which would make sense, actually, if that's the sort of person that you are.

There are certain things that you could encounter that basically unglue you. What happens is that those moments of being unglued travel up that entire hierarchy of presuppositions. One of the logical conclusions to being betrayed in a relationship is that you're truly a bad person. Now, another equally logical conclusion is that the person that you're with is really a bad person. Another logical conclusion is that all people are truly bad people—in both macro and micro ways. You can't trust anyone. You can't trust women; you can't trust men; you can't trust human beings; you can't trust yourself. The whole place is a catastrophe. It's a nightmare. Well, then you can fall through into chaos.

Maybe you're supposed to be getting a promotion at work. That's good. You're all chipper about the promotion at work. You walk into your boss's office because he or she wants to see you, and they say, well, you know, we're

because he or she wants to see you, and they say, well, you know, we've reviewed your performance over the last few years. Your performance has been somewhere between mediocre and decent. We're downsizing and... See ya later. That's not a raise or a promotion. That's a hole that you fall into. The question is, what do you make of that? How do you frame that? How do you take that emerging chaos and make habitable order out of it? You don't know. Is the whole capitalist system rotten to the core? I mean, that's a convenient explanation under those circumstances. Were you working for a psychopathic son of a bitch? Did you make the wrong choice in university? And was that your father's fault, because you never did what you wanted? Or was it your fault for not standing up to him? Or is it a dying industry? Or maybe this is a wakeup call that you should go do something else that you've actually wanted to do your whole life, and that's why you're doing such a miserable job at your current occupation, because you're bitter and resentful about the fact that you never did what you want. You don't know! It's all of those things at once. That's very stressful, because all of those things at once is too many things.

That's the reemergence of chaos. That's the flood. That's the return to the beginning of the cosmos. That's another way that it's been represented mythologically. You voyage all the way back to the beginning of the cosmos when there's nothing but undifferentiated chaos. That's what you're confronting, and maybe it's too much for you—and often it is. That can be traumatizing. It can hurt your brain. It's just too much for you to bear. It doesn't matter; you're stuck with it. How do you respond to that? Well, some of it is catastrophic negative emotion. You freeze, and that's protective. Maybe you don't even want to move. You don't want to bloody well get out of bed for a week, and that's because your body's reacting as if the bedroom floor's covered with snakes, and the best thing for you to do is just not move. Freeze. Not a pleasant situation to be in, because you're hyper-aroused. It is very, very physiologically demanding, and there's zero about it that's productive except that, maybe, the snakes won't see you. But they've already seen you, so that isn't helping very well.

So you've got all this undifferentiated negative emotion, anxiety, fear, hurt, anger, guilt, shame, emotional pain, the whole plethora of catastrophes, and then maybe, on the other side, lurking down there, is thank God I'm done with that job. I just bloody well hated it. I dragged myself off to work every day, and there's a little part of my soul that's so goddamn happy I finally got fired that I can hardly stand it. Maybe you don't even admit that to yourself, because, well, that would mean that all that time you spent at the job was just sunk cost. You were deluding yourself the whole time. It is an interesting thing to consider,

though, if you're in the unpleasant circumstance of having to fire someone. Sometimes, firing someone is the best thing that can happen to them, which doesn't mean that you should go out and enjoy it—I have met very disagreeable people who actually enjoyed firing people. I'll tell you a story about that at some point. It's quite interesting. But, sometimes, if someone's just limping along in their job and doing it as miserably and wretchedly as they possibly can imagine, the best thing you can do to for them is to say, you know, you're failing at this—and that doesn't necessarily mean that you would have to be failing at absolutely everything else in the entire world. Maybe you should just accept the damn failure, go off, and try something new. That's terrifying for people, and I know they hate it and all that, but sometimes it's better than the alternative, which is just slow, torturous death.

Here's a funny way of looking at it: Let's say you fall right into the hole that's underneath everything. You've hit an anomaly that you don't understand. You say, what's the anomaly made out of, exactly? I know that's a strange way of thinking about it. It's a metaphor. What's that anomaly made out of? Well, here's a way of thinking about it: it's made out of spirited matter. This is something I learned, in part, from [Piaget](#). Well, the anomaly is made of matter because, of course, that's the world: matter. The world is also what matters, and so that's kind of a nice duality, there. But it's also made out of spirit, because when you encounter something anomalous and go down the rabbit hole, when you go into the underworld that's underneath everything that you've relied on, you learn things down there. What's down there is information. It may be way more information than you want, but it is information. What can you do with the information? You can inform yourself with the information, right? You can put yourself in formation with the information. That's helpful, too.

Maybe you're a psyche instead of a spirit. It depends on whether you're a materialist or not, but at least we can say that you're a psyche. The question is, what's your psyche made of? It's obviously got a material substrate, but the matter happens to be arrayed in a particular order, and that's an information order. And so you encounter that latent information when you fall into the underworld that's underneath everything. Then what you can do is enhance your psyche. You can grow your spirit. What you do is you take the new information and incorporate it. That's like eating the apple that Adam and Eve ate. You incorporate that, and that makes more of you. That's not a metaphorical or a metaphysical proposition. It's to say nothing other than, oh, that's what happens when children learn.

Think of what happens: A child's three, has a pretty low resolution representation of the world, and is a fairly low resolution human being. They have all of the constituent elements, but they are not differentiated in any tremendous manner. That's all still to come in the future. So what does the child do? Explore. What do they explore? Things they don't understand. That's where the information is, because you already understand what you understand. There's no information there. You go where you don't understand. That's where the information is. Out of that information, you generate a higher resolution world, and you generate a higher resolution self. You generate spirit and matter out of the combat with the underlying dragon of chaos. That's what you do when you go down into the underworld—if it doesn't kill you, or if it doesn't make you wish you were dead, which you probably will wish. But there's a bunch of you that has to die down there anyways, so maybe that's not such a bad thing.

If you had this relationship that ended in betrayal, then there's something that's just not exactly right, right? You think, well, that's kind of moralistic. Well, actually, I don't mind being moralistic, in case you haven't noticed. But it's not a fair comment, because you're playing the stupid game. It's like, you live with someone in fidelity. That's the game, right? You've decided the rules. With the game comes a morality. The morality are the rules of the game. Then the thing collapses into infidelity. It's like, well, you played the game wrong, or it was the wrong game. It's one of those two. You picked the damn game, and having picked the game, you can't all of a sudden say, no, those aren't the rules. It's like, yea, yea. If you picked the game, you've picked the rules. And if you fail at complying with the rules, then you've failed. Now you could say that you could pick a different game. I don't care how you solve the problem. You're still stuck with the problem. It's a moral problem, fundamentally, and it might take some major league retooling to fix it.

So you're at point A, trying to get to point B. That's not working out. You hit an anomaly. You're not getting to point B. You're a medical school student. You write your MCAT, which is this test you have to write to go to medical school. You get 25th percentile. I don't know who you are, but you're not a premed student—and maybe you never were, right? And that's the rub, man. So who the hell are you? You don't know. Collapse, down here, into this place of motivational and emotional uncertainty and tremendous information. It's a place of transformation. It's the phoenix that burns. It's the journey to the underworld. It's the journey to hell. It can really be a journey to hell, because you may find out that the reason that your partner betrayed you, or that you didn't get your

damn promotion, is that there's seriously something wrong with you, and you know it—and I don't just mean that you don't know what you're doing. I mean that there's 25 percent of you that is seriously aiming at things not being good.

And so you fall into the underworld, and you find out that, uh oh...God, I just got exactly what I was aiming for. Or, I got exactly what the worst part of me was aiming for. That worst part is something to clean up. That's not going to be easy, because it's got its hooks in me like something seriously ferocious. I've been toying with it for a very long time, and maybe I can't even detach it anymore. That's not so fun. You see people like that in therapy very frequently, or you see them wandering around on the streets like catastrophic former shells of themselves. They've hit the underworld; and they ended up in hell, and there's no getting out of it. Those are the people you tend to give a wide berth to when you walk down the street. So there you are, down in the underworld, right back where the latent information exists, and there's just too much of it. That's this. It's the same thing, and that's why the Adam and Eve story is archetypal. We're always ingesting something new that knocks us into a new state of self-consciousness. It's always a catastrophic demolition of our previous paradise—insufficient as that paradise was. Something comes along to destroy it, and it knocks the slats out of our life. That's a voyage to the underworld: out of the walled garden and into chaos.

What is all of that? Well, there's lots of ways of construing it. It's a frame transformation. There's a walled city. It's got a hole in it, because all walled cities have holes in them, right? Everything's imperfect, and that's where the chaos comes up. Maybe you go out there like a hero to fight the chaos and to reestablish the frame. That's what you're supposed to do, and maybe you free some information while you're doing that. Or maybe you establish a relationship. And so that's the journey: frame, damage, chaos, voluntary confrontation, reconstitution of the world. That's human existence. Hopefully it's not just linear. It's stepwise.

The you that emerges as a consequence of your latest catastrophe is everything that you were before plus something more. That actually constitutes what you might describe as measurable progress, right? That's another argument against moral relativism. If you can do everything that you could do before, and you can do some more things? We can just define that as better. It's not a bad definition. And then we have an up. What you're trying to do is differentiate the world and differentiate yourself. Every time you undergo one of these revolutions, hopefully both of those things happen. And then there's a moral to that story,



too, which is to do it voluntarily, and maybe don't wait for it to happen catastrophically. Keep your eyes open, and when something goes a little bit wrong that you could fix, fix it. Don't say, no, that doesn't matter. Maybe it does matter—maybe it is matter. Maybe it's exactly the matter out of which you should be built. Maybe it's the matter out of which the world should be built. If part of you is telling you it matters, what it means is that there's something there that you need to engage with. That's what it means for something to matter.

I really get a kick out of the word matter. It's got these two weird meanings, right? There's the matter that materialists think everything is made out of, and that's just dead matter. And then there's the matter which life is made out of, which is what matters. Now and then you're moving through life and something matters. It's calling to you. That's the unrevealed world trying to reveal itself to you. All you have to do is allow it to reveal itself to you, and then, maybe, a minor shift in shape is all that has to happen to you. You don't have to burn right down to the bloody egg and hatch out as a newborn. Maybe you can just repair a little bit of something that's gone wrong with you, so you can undergo a sequence of continual micro deaths instead of waiting for the bloody catastrophe that might send you so far down that you'll never recover.

All you have to do is attend to what matters. Your whole nervous system is doing this for you. You've got a goal; something happens; it matters. So what are you supposed to do with that? You're supposed to fix it. You're supposed to engage with it. That's why it's calling out to you as if it matters. It's saying that there's an indeterminate part of the world, here, that wants to manifest itself into fully articulated being, and it's called to you to do that. If you ignore it, then it accumulates. If it accumulates, it turns into the dragon of chaos. It waits until you're not at your best, and then it eats you. That's the alternative. So that seems like a bad plan unless you like being lunchmeat.

So that's a long introduction to Noah. Well, you need it, because you can't understand the story otherwise. That's what the story's about. Now we can go through the story relatively rapidly, although it doesn't look like we will go through all of it tonight. Ok, so we'll start with the next section of Genesis. This is immediately after Cain and Abel. There's a short story to begin with—just a fragment. I called it "Giants of the Earth."

"And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth"—so this is after Cain and Abel—"and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair: and took them wives of all

OF GOD SAW THE DAUGHTERS OF MEN THAT THEY WERE FAIR, AND TOOK THEM WIVES OF ALL which they chose. And the Lord said, My spirit shall always strive with man, for that he is also flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown."

Now there's been all sorts of attempts to interpret those few rather jumbled lines. But I see it as a reflection of a classic development of hero mythology. This is sort of nostalgia for the past. One of the things Mircea Eliade pointed out was that what happens to human memory in preliterate cultures—because nothing is written down—is that what needs to be preserved gets amalgamated. Imagine that you have a culture that's based on fishing. You have to be a good fisherman. Human beings who use simple tools to fish are unbelievably good fishermen. They know every bloody thing you can possibly imagine about fish, otherwise they'd die. So it's really important that they learn everything about fish. Maybe they've been fishing for like 13,000 years, or something like that. There's a lot of accumulated knowledge. So then the question is, well, who taught mankind how to fish? The answer is, fragments of individuals across history. But you're not going to remember the damn fragments. You put them all together into the amalgam of the heroic fisherman—the guy who established the pattern for proper fishing, whatever that pattern happens to be. One of the patterns might be to not take all the damn fish, because then there won't be any for the next year. But all of those fragments of discovery get amalgamated into heroes of the past. Then what you do, if you're a fisherman, is you act out the heroic fisherman of the past. The idea that there were men of renown, or heroes, in the past is just a fragment of that sequence of ideas—back in the past, there were mighty human beings who established the proper patterns of being. They were the sons of God, who took the daughters of men to wife. It's interesting, too, because we do know that the more competent men are disproportionately likely to leave offspring. It's a perfectly reasonable way of formulating the circumstance.

Onto the flood. This is from Mircea Eliade, who wrote a book called [The History of Religious Ideas](#), which I strongly recommend. It's a three-volume set. It's quite readable. It's brilliant. I really like it. This is what Mircea Eliade had to say about flood myths: "As has been well known since the compilations made by R. Andree, H. Usener, and J.G. Frazer, the deluge myth is almost universally disseminated; it is documented in all the continents (although very rarely in Africa) and on various cultural levels. A certain number of variants seem to be

the result of dissemination,"—rather than spontaneous regeneration, let's say —"First from Mesopotamia and then from India. It is equally possible that one or several diluvial catastrophes gave rise to fabulous narratives. But it would be risky to explain so widespread a myth by a phenomena of which no geological traces has been found."

Well, Eliade wrote this quite a while ago. I think he wrote that book in the 80s, maybe in the 70s. But, since then, there actually has been quite a bit of evidence advanced in various circles for the existence of catastrophic floods that occurred within the relative human civilization memory, let's say. So the West Coast Indians, for example—I suppose that's the wrong word. I don't know what to say. I know a [Kwakwaka'wakw](#) carver, who told me a flood story. They have a story that's almost identical to the story of Noah, except, of course, it involves giant canoes. But it's the same story. If I remember correctly, they release a raven. Noah releases a raven first and then a dove once the flood comes to an end. And it has a Tower of Babel issue, too: The canoes are all put together. It's not one giant canoe; it's a bunch of canoes all together. They ride out the flood. And then the canoes separate and go all over the world. That's why there are people all over the world.

Anyways, the story is very widely disseminated. But there were floods in North America, and not that long ago. You can look up the [Missoula Floods](#). They happened 13 to 15 thousand years ago. The Kwakwaka'wakw people have probably been on the West Coast for something like 13 to 14 thousand years. You can maintain an oral tradition for a very, very long time. You think, no, but traditional societies don't change. That's why they're traditional. So they have the same stories over a generation. They remember the same stories.

The Missoula Floods were a consequence of melting glacial ice. They figured there were 55 of them between 15 thousand and 13 thousand years ago, and that they discharged volumes up to 15 times the volume of the Amazon River. These were major league floods. [SMBE](#) published a paper in 2008 called [Climate Change and Postglacial Human Dispersal in Southeast Asia](#), claiming that there were multiple floods, particularly effecting Southeast Asia between 15 thousand and 7 thousand years ago. So Eliade might be a bit wrong about the notion that there were no geological traces of such catastrophic flooding. But, anyways, it doesn't matter, because we're still looking at this from a psychological perspective, and that's fine.

"The majority of the flood myths seem in some sense to form part of the cosmic

The majority of the flood myths seem in some sense to form part of the cosmic rhythm: the old world, peopled by a fallen humanity, is submerged under the waters, and some time later a new world emerges from the aquatic "chaos." In a large number of variants, the flood is the result of the sins (or ritual faults) of human beings: sometimes it results simply from the wish of a divine being to put an end to mankind...the chief causes lie at once in the sins of men and the decrepitude of the world."

It's a brilliant analysis, partly because it draws this lovely parallel—which I mentioned a bit earlier—between the fact that things go wrong all by themselves and the fact that you can speed that along by not paying any attention. So if you're in a relationship—you know, a relationship takes an awful lot of maintenance, and you know when it needs to be maintained because you start developing some distance from the person that you have the relationship with. Then that starts to become tinged with a little bit of dislike—hopefully not contempt but a little bit of dislike, and maybe some emotional distance. You feel that, and you think...Well, it's hard to tell what you think. But you feel that, anyways. You know that that's emerged. Then you have a chance, at that point, to repair whatever's gone wrong. That would require some retooling on both of your parts. Maybe one person more than the other, but whatever. It requires serious discussion: I've noticed that this has been happening; and maybe it's you and maybe it's me. We should probably figure it out, because it would be convenient if it was you, but if it was me, then I'd like to fix it, because then it would be fixed. That's why you listen to your partner. They might tell you that there's something stupid about you that you don't know. If you could fix that, then you wouldn't have to be stupid in that way anymore. It's actually one of the genuinely useful features of having a partner. Do you really want to be stupid and continue to repeat your mistakes, ad nauseam, for the rest of your life? I know it's more convenient to do that than it is to have a knock down, drag 'em out argument about just exactly why you're stupid and how you could fix it. But it's better to have the argument.

So the chief causes lie at once in the sins of men and the decrepitude of the world. The sins are generally either acts of omission where people do things that they know to be wrong, or failures to do things that they know would be right. It doesn't really matter. Sins of omission are usually judged more harshly, say within the Judeo-Christian tradition. But I think there might be a bit of an error in that. Sins of omission can be a real catastrophe. So here's a flood idea. Tell me what you think about this. So there's this idea that a judgemental being will flood you out if you continue on your wayward ways. That seems like a little bit

of...It's one of the examples of Jehovah being a little on the harsh side in the Old Testament—not something that modern people really approve of, so much. We like our God sort of domesticated. Unfortunately, that isn't how it tends to work.

I've often thought about the reaction in North America to the hurricane in New Orleans. There's two ways of reading that, right? One is that mother nature has a little fit and sends a hurricane into New Orleans, and wipes everyone out. Isn't that a catastrophe, and isn't that an example of our fragility in the face of natural power. There is another way of reading it. Maybe this is unfair, but it'll do for the purpose of illustration. The Dutch build dikes to keep the ocean back. They're actually pretty effective at that, because their country is mostly underwater. It turns out that if you go to Holland, it's actually not underwater. And so their dikes are working. The Dutch were very organized people, and they better be, because their country's supposed to be underwater. You better be organized if your country's supposed to be underwater. And so they are very organized, and they have a rule for their dikes. They try to estimate the worst possible oceanic storm that will come in 10,000 years, and then they make sure that the dikes will withstand that.

Well, from my reading, the army corp of engineers in New Orleans built the dikes for a storm every 100 years. That's not so good, because we live about 80 years. That means the probability that one of those storms is going to come whipping by in a lifespan is pretty damn high. So that, perhaps, wasn't the wisest of planning, especially because some of New Orleans is actually supposed to be underwater. And then, worse, Mississippi is a state that's quite well known for its corruption. And so you might also say that a tremendous amount of the time, money, and resources that could have, should have, and was planned to go towards fixing the problem didn't. And so the hurricane came along and, oh my God, wasn't it a natural disaster! The question is, what bloody well makes you so sure that it was a natural disaster? If the infrastructure wasn't maintained and built to the specifications that were technically possible, and would have actually been less expensive in the long run to build, and everyone knew it, and the hurricane came along and wiped out the city, why do you think that's a natural disaster? To me, that's a natural example—if you think about it from a metaphorical perspective—of a judgemental God deciding to use a flood to teach a moral lesson.

You might say that that's pretty harsh. What about all those flood survivors? It's like, yes, well, the whole flood thing was kind of harsh. Pointing out that there

like, yea, well, the whole flood thing was kind of harsh. Pointing out that there were steps that could have been taken, that I doubt in the aftermath have been taken, even though everyone knows now exactly what happened... You might consider it a diagnosis. But it's irrelevant. What I'm really trying to tell you is how the mythological stories would line up on this. You could tell a story about mother nature manifesting her catastrophe and potential for tragedy, or you could tell another story, of an absolute failure of the human social structure and the human individual to address a problem that everyone knew was there. That's a good example of how the flood comes when you're not behaving properly.

One of the things that's quite interesting about the Old Testament and the people who wrote it is that they always assumed that if the flood comes, that meant that you weren't prepared. It's like the a priori axiom. You got flooded out? Hey, you weren't prepared enough. How can you tell? Well, you got flooded out. That's the evidence. And you might say, well, that's not very fair. Fair isn't the point. The point is, do you want to get flooded out again, or not? Fair would be, well, you better figure out why you got flooded out, and you better fix it so that it doesn't happen again. That's the moral thing to do when you're thinking about morality as walking the path that's most appropriate to get to the destination that you think would be the best possible destination.

"By the mere fact that it exists, that is it lives and produces, the cosmos gradually deteriorates, and it ends by falling into decay. That is the reason why it has to be recreated. In other words, the flood realizes on the macro cosmic scale what is symbolically effected during the New Year festival: the end of the world, and the end of a sinful humanity in order to make a new creation possible."

There's a lot of information packed into those few lines that Eliade wrote. In the Mesopotamian rituals, the Mesopotamians would act out the collapse of the kingdom into chaos—at the New Year's festival, essentially. It's kind of what you do when you make resolutions. It's a degenerate. What you'd say is, our proclivity to make New Year's resolutions is sort of a degenerate ritual. I don't mean that it's bad. I mean that it's the remnants of something much grander. The Mesopotamians would take their emperor outside the walled city once a year. They would make him kneel, and they'd take off all his kingly clothes, and then they'd whack him with a glove if I remember correctly. The priest would do that. Then they'd make him recount all the ways he wasn't being a good emperor that year—that he wasn't being a good Marduk. That was who he was supposed to be on earth, and that's the guy with eyes all the way around his head, who speaks magic words, and who transforms chaos into order. That's what the emperor's

supposed to do.

The emperor should have a little humility, here, because you're not God incarnate. You've probably made some mistakes. Can you think of any ways in the last year that you didn't take advantage of every opportunity that you possibly could have to take some spare chaos and transform it into habitable order? That's a good thing to think about. Well, that's what you're thinking about when you make a New Year's resolution, even though you don't know it. Could you be a better person in the upcoming year?

You can imagine the flood, and then you can set yourself straight, and then you can prepare for it. That means that maybe you can stave it off. It also means that, maybe, even if you don't stave it off, you can ride it out. That's actually the story of Noah. What happens with Noah is that he can see that things are not good, and that there's a flood coming. God is letting him know. It says in the story that Noah walked with God. Remember—that's what Adam did before he got all self-conscious about the whole thing. He walked with God. We'll talk about that more next time. But what that would mean, maybe, is that because Noah was straight, and he put himself together, and his familial relationships were good, he could see a little farther into the future than someone whose vision was completely obscured by fog and chaos. He could tell that things were not going to go well, and so he prepared for it. And because he prepared for it, well, things actually went pretty well for Noah, even though the flood came.

That's a pretty interesting thing. That's an indeterminate issue in human existence. How big a hurricane would it take to wipe out New Orleans if everyone was prepared? Well, you're not going to wipe out the Dutch. That's going to be a tough one, man. You're going to have to conjure up a pretty damn big storm to take out their dikes. How thoroughly defended could New Orleans be if nobody in the municipal and state government was corrupt? Well, it would be the end of the hurricane problem, because that's something that we could clearly deal with. We know how to do it. The same applies in your own life. There are floods coming. You can bloody well be sure of that. That's absolutely, 100 percent certain. Some of them are going to be personal; some of them are going to be familial; some of them are going to be social, political, and economic. Are they going to be catastrophes for you, or are you going to ride them out? Are you going to prepare?

The first issue might be, do you have your act together well enough to see them coming with enough advance warning so that you can take proper measures?

...coming from enough distance warning so that you can take proper measures. Maybe just to sidestep it—maybe to just not go where the flood is going to be. That's a simple thing. But maybe you don't have that luxury. It is going to be a catastrophe. Maybe someone in your family is going to get really, really sick. Maybe there's just a tiny pathway through that so that everything doesn't fall apart: it doesn't end in divorce; it doesn't end in death; it doesn't end in sorrow; it doesn't end in catastrophe. But the margin of error is like slimmed down to virtually zero. Every imperfection that you bring to that situation is going to increase the probability that that tragedy's going to turn into something indistinguishable from hell. And that's coming. It's coming your way, absolutely. So then you might think, well, since it's coming your way, maybe the best thing to do is to put yourself together, so that it can be the least amount of awful possible when it comes.

I'll close with a story. This was a very affecting story for me. My mother-in-law had frontotemporal dementia. She developed it quite young. She's about 55. Her husband, who was a very extraverted, man-about-town guy—I grew up in a small town, and everybody knew him. He was charismatic, drank too much, a good businessman, and quite a remarkable person. A real character. But not exactly a family man, even though he provided for his family very well. When his wife got sick, he really took care of her, man. It was something to see. Dealing with someone who has Alzheimer's, for all intents and purposes, is no joke. They get taken away from you piece by piece, and that is not pretty. It's also hard. Not only is it catastrophic but it's hard. Jesus—he just stepped into that perfectly. It was way less awful than it could have been. It was just a tragedy; it wasn't hell.

I was there when she died. My wife's family are actually pretty good at dealing with death, as it turns out. My wife's sister is a palliative care nurse. You have to be a pretty tough cookie to be a palliative care nurse, but you can do it, which is pretty interesting. It means that you can go make relationships with people at the last stages of their life that are genuine relationships, and people just die on you nonstop. Yet she's a competent, alive, alert, fun person. Two thumbs up for her, man. That's someone you can rely on in a tragedy. Her other sister is a pharmacist. My wife has volunteered in palliative care wards, and she is also very good at taking care of people who are genuinely not in good health.

So we were there when my mother-in-law died. Here's a deathbed situation for you: your mother-in-law is dying, and everyone's at each other's throats. If you think that's uncommon, then your eyes aren't open. It's plenty bloody common.



And then it's not just a tragedy: it's hell. Maybe you can stand the tragedy, but you can't stand the hell. In this situation, that isn't what happened. Everybody pulled together. She died, but what was so interesting was that the family actually came together more tightly as a consequence. So although there was something taken away on the one hand, there was something gained on the other that wasn't trivial.

I'm not trying to be all optimistic and isn't the universe a wonderful place about all of this. Someone died in an ugly way, and it was harsh. But, God, it was a hell of a lot better than it could have been, and maybe it was good enough. That's the thing. This is something that I constantly wonder: if people did what they could to speak the truth and pay attention, then maybe the tragedy that's part of life wouldn't have to deteriorate into the unbearable hell that doesn't have to be part of life. Maybe we could actually tolerate the tragedy. Maybe we could even rise above it—or maybe we could even mitigate it, because we can. We do that sort of thing all the time. It's always an open question.

Eliade put it very well. Are the floods the consequence of the fact that things fall apart? Or are the floods a consequence of the fact that people make mistakes that they know they shouldn't make and make anyways? They sin, right? And that's to miss the mark. That's an archery term, to sin. They don't even specify the damn target, which is really... You're not going to hit it unless you specify it. Or, having specified it, they just say, oh, to hell with it; it's not that important. You've got to be careful when you say something like to hell with it; it's not that important. One of the things that might happen to you is that you might actually end up in hell for a pretty prolonged period of time—or maybe for the remainder of your miserable existence. It's certainly the case that people do exist there. I've seen them exist there. Once you're there, it's no simple matter to get the hell out. And so it might matter that the things that matter get addressed. It might matter that you do what you can to walk with God. As I said, we'll talk more about that next time. And it might be that that is how you build an ark and are protected from the flood, even if the damn thing comes. The thing is, it will.

This is a funny thing that I've noticed about our education system and the way we teach students. There are trigger warnings and all of that—absolutely rubbish. In most of my lectures, I'd have to have a trigger warning every 15 seconds. I tell my students when they're young, look, don't fool yourself; you're going to develop a serious illness—at least one, maybe two or three, and one of them is likely to be chronic. And if it isn't you, it's going to be someone you love. It's going to be your husband: it's going to be your parent: it's going to be

your kids. That's coming, and so is a lot of death and pain. Just exactly what sort of person are you going to be when that shows up? That's the right question. It isn't, how are you going to be happy in your life? It's like, good luck with that. It's a stupid ambition, anyways, as far as I'm concerned, because it's too shallow. Happiness comes and goes like the sun coming out from behind a cloud. If you're happy, more power to you. Enjoy it. It's a gift from the cosmos to be happy. But a pursuit? No. The pursuit is, when the damn flood comes, you want to be the person who built the ark. And that's what the story of Noah is about.

The flood is always coming. That's another thing that's worth commenting on with regards to this story. There's an apocalyptic element to the Judeo-Christian tradition. There's an idea that the end of the world is always at hand, and that you should be prepared to be judged. The thing about that is, it's true. The reason it's true is because the end of your world is at hand. It will certainly come, and you will be judged when it comes. It will be up to you to figure out what to do with the fact that your world just collapsed. That will be a moral problem of ultimate severity. It'll push you right to your limits, and you'll find out where exactly your unaddressed weaknesses lie, because that's what happens in a crisis. The reason that's an archetypal reality, and the reason that it lurks underneath the entire Judeo-Christian structure—the impending apocalypse—is that we always live in apocalyptic times. Your world is always, in small ways and large ways, coming to an end. So what do you do? You prepare for it. You prepare for your world to come to an end. And then, maybe, when the end comes, you get another world. That'd be a good deal. So we're ready for this next week.

## **VII: Walking with God: Noah and the Flood**

Thank you. I looked today, and these lectures have now been viewed a million times. That's pretty amazing—or they've been glanced at a million times. That's also possible. All right. Let's get right into it. Last week, I think, was mostly remarkable for the absolute dearth of content that was actually Biblically related. I'll just recap what I laid out so that it sets the frame properly for what we're going to discuss tonight. I presented you with an elaborated description of this diagram, essentially, which I spent quite a bit of time formulating—probably about 25 years ago, I guess, which kind of accounts for its graphic primitiveness. I was really pushing the limits of my 486 computer to produce that, I can tell you. It's a representation of the archetypal circumstances of life. The archetypal circumstances are the circumstances that are true under all conditions for all time. So you can think about them as descriptively characteristic of the nature of human experience. That's not exactly the same as the nature of reality, because you can divide reality into its subjective and objective elements. There's utility in doing that. But these sorts of representations don't play that game. They consider human experience as constitutive of reality. That's how we experience it, and so we'll just go with that.

The idea, basically, is that we always exist inside a damaged structure. That structure is partly biological and partly sociocultural. It's partly what's been handed to us by our ancestors, both practically, in terms of infrastructure, and psychologically, in terms of the active, learned content of our psyches. That would include, for example, our ability to utilize language, the words that we use, the phrases that we use, and the mutual understanding that we developed as a consequence of interacting with each other. Archetypally speaking, that structure's always dead and corrupt. The reason it's dead is because it was made by people who are dead. The reason it's corrupt is because things fall apart of their own accord. The fact that people don't aim properly, let's say, speeds along that process of degeneration. What that means is that young people always have a reason to be upset and cynical about the current state of affairs. It's forever that way.

It's useful, I think, to consider such conceptualizations as the patriarchy in that light. It's an archetypal truth that the social structure is corrupt and incomplete. What that means is that it's something that you have to contend with in every moment of your life. It's a permanent fact of existence, and to be upset that the

social structures—or even the biological structures—within which we live are incomplete and imperfect, and to take that personally...That's the worst part of it. To take that personally is to misread the existential condition of humankind.

It's always the case that what you have been given, and what you live in, is degenerate, corrupt, and in need of repair. It's easier to just accept that, because there's also a positive element. The positive element is, well, you've been granted something, rather than nothing, and maybe you haven't been granted pure hell. There's room for gratitude, especially in a country like ours, where many things actually function quite well. Even if it's a broken machine, it's not one that's completely devastated, and it's not absolutely hellbent, at every second, on your misery and destruction. It easily could be. Many societies are like that. The fact that we happen to live in one that isn't corrupt beyond imagining is something to be eternally grateful for.

So we live inside a damaged structure. We also bear responsibility for that damage, because we don't do everything we can to constantly repair it. People say, what's the meaning of life? What they really mean is, what's the positive meaning of life? Because—as we've already discussed—the negative meanings of life are more or less self-evident. Well, the positive meaning of life is to be found in noting the state of lack of repair of the walled city that you inhabit, and then sallying forth to do something about that—to repair the breaches, fix up the walls, and to make the structure that you inhabit as secure and as productive as it possibly can be.

There's no shortage of opportunities to do that. You can do that in your own mind; you can do that in your own room; you can do that in your own household; you can do that in your own local community. Maybe, if you get good at doing that at all those levels, you can start to look beyond that. There's challenges. That's the thing that's kind of interesting about this insufficient structure: it has a set of challenges built into it, because of its insufficiency, and, perhaps, even because of its corrupt nature. It calls forth the potential response from you of heroic adventure. Heroic adventure is to man the barricades and repair the city. You can always do that. It doesn't matter what your personal circumstances are. There's always something that isn't right near you—that isn't correct or laid out properly—that you could just fix, if you wanted to.

One of the things that we're going to talk about tonight is the idea that, if you adopt an attitude that's like that, the rule that you should play is to make things better, wherever you are, however you can. What would actually happen would

be that things would get better, wherever you are, in all sorts of ways. We've really, as a species, you might say—or even as singular individuals—explored that rarely. It isn't something that's put forth as a proposition that often. It's quite surprising to me.

I had an interesting experience the other day. I went to The Keg. I go there because I have food allergies, and they're very careful with people who have food allergies. The waiter took me to the table. He said that he'd been watching my lectures. That's a very common experience. He said that he'd had two promotions at The Keg in the past four months because he'd been watching my lectures. I really found that an affecting experience. You might say, well, he's working as a waiter at The Keg, and there's nothing particularly heroic about that. I disagree with that, actually, because I don't care where you're located.

You can do a hell of a job. I mean that literally. You can take whatever job you have and make it a real nice little piece of absolute misery. Or you can act like a civilized human being and notice that, no matter where you are, there's a richness and a complexity that's completely inexhaustible, right at hand. And then you can take that seriously. You can say, well, I happen to be a waiter at The Keg. Perhaps that's not what I expected—and he's a young guy—and perhaps that's not where I want to end up, but it's not nothing. It's a rich environment, and I can make it a lot better, if I want to. I can get along properly with my coworkers, and not gossip behind their back. I can treat my customers properly. And if an opportunity comes my way, I can take it, and I can see what happens.

He said that's what he started doing. Things were working out much better for him. He was in a much better job than he was three months ago. In three months; that's nothing. That's a nice trajectory. It's an uphill trajectory. That's what you want, really. An uphill trajectory's actually better than being somewhere good, as far as I'm concerned. One of the things that really makes your life meaningful is the clear realization that you're heading somewhere better than where you are now. And then it's even better if you also understand that there's a direct causal relationship between the things that you're doing and the steepness of that incline.

I get a lot of letters from people like that. They are most frequently young men, although not always. They say, I've been listening to these lectures, and I've decided that I'm going to try to take responsibility for my life. I started to stop doing all the stupid things that I know are stupid and that I shouldn't be doing

doing all the stupid things that I know are stupid and that I shouldn't be doing. I've started doing some of the things that aren't stupid that I know I should be doing. It seems pretty obvious, really, if you think about it. But, obvious though it may be, that isn't necessarily what people do. And then they write and say, you can't believe what difference that makes. They're thrilled about it, and so I'm thrilled about it.

I really don't experience anything that's better than a letter like that or a message like that. It's so good to see things that aren't so good replaced by something better. I truly believe it's an open question: to what degree could we make things better if that's what we actually aimed at doing? In some of the stories that we've covered already—the story of Cain and Abel, in particular—there is really an analysis of that problem, which is so remarkable. It occurs so early in this document. It's such a foundational story. It basically says that there's two modes of being in the world: there's one where you adopt the responsibility for being properly, and you make the sacrifices necessary for doing that. Then everything will flourish properly. The other one is a pathway of resentment, bitterness, rejection, murder, and genocide. And that just seems exactly right to me.

Carl Jung once said that modern people didn't see God because they didn't look low enough. That's a phrase that I really, really like. People denigrate the opportunities that are right in front of them. There's no reason to do that. What's right in front of you is the majesty of being. That's what's right in front of you. It's inexhaustibly complex and full of potential. There's no reason to assume that wherever you happen to be isn't as good of a starting place as anywhere else. I know some people have terrible, terrible lives. They are in situations that are absolutely unbearable. But I also do know that even situations like that can be made a hell of a lot worse by the worst kind of attitude. That's for sure.

That's where you are. You're in a damaged structure—you are a damaged structure. But at least it's got some walls. You're not being fed to the lions on a regular basis. That's a good thing. You can emerge forward heroically, magically to confront the chaos that constantly threatens the structure within which you live. You can free something as a consequence of that. You can learn something; you can strengthen yourself. That's the other thing: what informs you, and what you're made of, is what you encounter when you voluntarily encounter the unknown. The more you voluntarily encounter the unknown, the more you get made of. The more you get made of, the more there is to you. And the more you're good at encountering the unknown, restructuring order, and calling forth proper order out of the potential of being...God, you got to think,

why wouldn't you do that, since you can do that?

It's an endless mystery. It's also encapsulated, to some degree, in the story of Adam and Eve. What happens to Adam is that he becomes self-conscious and ashamed of himself. He regards himself as a lowly sort of creature. There's endless reasons why people would do that. We're rife with imperfection, and so Adam hides from God. I think that's actually the answer to the conundrum: people don't aspire to the highest good because they're deeply ashamed of themselves, their weaknesses, and their insufficiencies. That's not the only reason. There's the desire to avoid responsibility, and there's all the negative motivations, as well, like resentment, hatred, and the desire to make things worse. I don't want to give us too much of a break. It's something like that. But it's ok to not be in a very good place if what you're trying to do with that not very good place is to make it better.

One of the things that I really have learned as a clinical psychologist is that you just could not believe how powerful incremental progress is. You can do the calculations. It's like compound interest. If you make your life a tenth of a percent better a week...Man, in two or three years, you're in such a better place than where you were that it isn't even like the same domain. If you keep that up for ten or twenty years—especially if you're young, start to straighten yourself out early, and start to fix the things that you can fix—you can transform your lives in ways that are completely unimaginable. God only knows what the upper limit of that is in terms of human possibility. We are amazing creatures when we really get our act together and stop running at 10 percent of our capacity.

So that's what you do. The fact that things aren't exactly the way that they should be at least gives you something to do, and maybe something great to do, because there's no shortage of suffering and trouble that besets the world that you could conceivably ameliorate. The utility and intrinsic meaning of that is self-evident. It also makes me curious about nihilism, for example, and despair. I understand those emotions. I understand them deeply, and the intellectual mindset that goes along with it. But they just seem beside the point, in some sense, because there are so many things that need doing that all you really have to do is open your eyes, look at them, and then decide that you're actually going to do something about them. You might think, well, what's within my scope of influence is so trivial that it's not worth doing. It's like, it won't stay trivial for long if you do it. Not at all, and I don't think it's trivial to begin with. I really don't believe that anything done right is trivial.

My experience, in my life, has been that anything that I actually did paid off. It didn't pay off necessarily in the way that I expected it to pay off. That's a whole different story. But if it was genuine commitment to do something, even if it went sideways and the outcome was really something other than what I expected, the net consequence, over time, was nothing but good. Every new frontier that can be conquered is an advance forward, and there's no shortage of frontier. We're surrounded by the unknown. We're surrounded by our own ignorance. We can continually move into the domain of chaos—or we can restructure pathological order. That's the secret to proper being.

So then you encounter chaos, and then you can regard yourself as the sort of entity that, despite its insufficiency, has the capability to conquer chaos—despite the danger of that. That's the other thing. The fact that you're fragile is actually a precondition for your heroism. If you weren't fragile, there wouldn't be anything heroic about doing something difficult, right? If you couldn't be hurt, damaged, defeated, or end up in failure, then where's the moral courage in the endeavour? It has to be that the fragility is built into the courage. It's not a reason not to engage in it, at all. In fact, quite the contrary.

So what do you do? Well, you put the city back together, and maybe the way you want it, so it's functional, efficient, and beautiful, and so that people can flourish in a manner that makes them feel that the unbearable catastrophe of being is worth it for the experience. That's what you're aiming at. It's not an impossibility. And then, not only do you repair the city when you do that, but you make yourself the sort of thing that continually repairs the city. That's even better. That's the end goal. It's not the repair of the city that's the goal: it's the transformation of yourself into the thing that continually repairs the city. There's just no reason for that not to happen. The more it can happen, the better.

There's an undercurrent to the story of the flood, and that's the fact that the city can become corrupt, and that's because people don't engage in heroic endeavour—or, perhaps, because they engage in precisely the opposite of that, which is outright destructive behaviour. This is also something that's worth considering, too. If you consider your own manner of being, you can say things to people, such as, tell the truth and be good. Those are clichés, obviously, and so they lack power. But you can take them apart, and utilize them in a manner that stops being a cliché. You do that by being more humble about them, I would say.

Maybe you can't tell the truth because you don't know what the truth is. But one thing you can do is to stop saying things that you know to be untrue. You might



thing you can do is to stop saying things that you know to be untrue. You might say, well, how do I know that they're untrue? Well, you need a whole elaboration of a philosophy of truth to answer that question. We're not going to bother with that question, because, at the moment, it's beside the point. That isn't the issue. The issue is that there are times in your life where you know that the thing that you're saying is not true. It's a deception. It's a lie of some sort, and you're using it to manipulate yourself, another person, or the world. You're also fully possessed by the idea that you can get away with it.

There's a Satanic arrogance about that. In fact, that is the archetypal arrogance that's portrayed in the mythological character of Satan. Satan is precisely the archetype of the element of the mind that believes it can twist and bend the structure of reality without paying the price. You can't imagine anything that's more arrogant than that. You really think that you can twist the structure of reality? And that that's going to work out for you, without it snapping back? It's so obvious that that can't work that everyone knows it.

Anyways, back to the initial point. You know, by the rules of the game that you yourself are playing, that, some of the time, you're violating the rules of the game that you're playing. The first issue with regards to, say, stating the truth or behaving in a responsible manner would be merely to stop cheating at whatever game it is that you've chosen to play. That's a good start. That'll straighten out your life.

Well, how does the flood tie into this? We live in a corrupt structure, and we're corrupt as individuals. Part of that corruption is just happenstance. It's the way things fall apart. But the other part of it is that, not only are we not aiming up, but we're actually aiming down. The flood story's a warning, and it's a very clear warning. The warning is that, if you aim down enough, and then if enough of you aim down at the same time, everything will degenerate into something that's indistinguishable from the chaos from which things emerge at the beginning of time. It's something like that.

The cosmos that's presented in mythological representations is chaos versus order. The order is on top, you might say, and the chaos is always underneath. The chaos can break through, or the order can crumble, and you can fall into the chaos. That chaos is intermingled potential. The way that you destroy the order and let the chaos rise back up—which is exactly how it's portrayed in the flood story—is by inhabiting the corpse of your father and feeding on the remains with no gratitude and no attempt to replenish what it is that you're taking from it.

That's one mythological motif.

The warning in the flood story is, don't do that for very long, because things will happen that are so awful that you cannot possibly imagine it. That'll happen to you personally; it'll happen to your family; it'll happen to your community, and it's happened to people over and over throughout history. It's quite interesting. It's very soon after the story of Cain and Abel when you see evil enter the world. In the story of Adam and Eve, along with self-consciousness, the evil, there, is the knowledge of good and evil; that's the ability to self-consciously hurt other people. Of course, instantly, Cain takes that to the absolute extreme. He uses that capacity to destroy, really, what he loves best. He gets as close as a human being can to destroying the divine ideal. Of course, his brother is Abel, and Abel is favoured by God. Cain destroys him. Cain tells God at the end of that episode that his punishment is more than he can bear. I think the reason for that is, where are you when you destroy your own ideal? What's left for you? There's nowhere to go. There's no up, and when there's no up, there's a lot of down.

There's an idea that was put forth very nicely in Milton's [Paradise Lost](#) when he was describing, from a psychological perspective, essentially what hell is: you're in hell to the degree that you're distant from the good. That might be a good way of thinking about it. If you destroy your own ideal—which you do with jealousy, resentment, and the desire to pull down people that you would like to be—then you end up in a situation that's indistinguishable from hell. The way the Biblical story unfolds is, well, it's Cain, and then it's the flood. Cain adopts this mode of being that's antithetical to being itself—at least to positive being itself. He does it knowing full well what he's doing. The net consequence of that, as it ripples through the entire social structure, is that God stands back and says, this whole thing has got so bad that the only thing we can do is wipe it to the ground. That is no joke. That's exactly how things work.

One of the things that's extraordinarily terrifying about that sequence of stories—and I believe this to be true. I think I realized this independently of any of the analysis that I was doing of mythological stories. I looked at what happened in places like the Soviet Union, Maoist China, and Nazi Germany. The most penetrating observers of those societies, the people who were most interested in how it was that those absolute catastrophes came about, all said the same thing: it was rooted in the degeneration of the individuals who made up the society. You hear that people were following orders. No; that explanation doesn't hold water. You hear that you would be punished if you resisted. There was some truth in that, but nowhere near as much as people might think, especially at the

beginnings of the process. It was more that people decided—each and every one of them—to turn a blind eye to the catastrophes and to participate in the lies. That warped entire societies, and they veered their way downward to something as closely approximating hell as you could manage, especially in places like Nazi Germany and, well, in all three of those places.

One of the things that's so frightening about the stories in Genesis is that they say something very clear: your moral degeneration contributes in no small way to the degeneration of the entire cosmos. You say, well, I would like my life to be meaningful. People say that. Really? Would you really like your life to be meaningful? You'd think people would trade a little nihilism for not having to face that particular realization. I think people do that all the time. It's a terrible weight to realize. But we are networked together. That's the vulnerability that's associated with our intense capacity to communicate. It's certainly possible that the ripples of our individual actions have consequences that are far beyond the limits of our immediate consciousness. I also think that people know that, too. They know that in the way that people know things when they don't want to know them, which means they know them embodied; they can feel them; they can sense them; they have an emotional response to them, but there's no damn way they're going to let them become articulated, because they don't want to know. When you're feeling guilty and ashamed about the things you've done or not done—I know that can get out of hand, as well—it's often because there is a crooked little part of you that's aiming at the worst possible outcome.

One of the things Jung said about the [shadow](#)—Jung's famous idea that everyone has a dark side, and that that dark side needs to be incorporated and made conscious—was that the shadow of the human being reaches all the way to hell. That's the thing that's so interesting about reading Carl Jung: he actually means what he says. It's not a metaphor. The part of you that's twisted against being is aligned with the part of the conscious cosmos, let's say, that's aiming at making everything as terrible as it can possibly be.

It's a terrible shock to realize that. That's partly why people don't realize it. It's something that people keep at an arm's length. It's the same as recognizing yourself as a Nazi concentration camp guard, which is a very useful exercise. There's absolutely no reason why you couldn't have been or still could be one. And if you think otherwise, all the more reason for assuming that you would be unable to resist the temptation if it was, in fact, offered to you. And if you don't think it's a temptation, then there's so much that you don't know about human

beings that you're not even in the game. If it wasn't a temptation, then people bloody well wouldn't have done it. Plenty of people did it, and it's no wonder.

So things get serious in Genesis very, very rapidly. The depth of the seriousness is ultimate—archetypal. It gets as serious as it can get. The story of Noah and the flood opens in a fragmentary manner. I believe that these passages are a part of a longer story that we only have bits and pieces of, and also that it's part of more than one story.

"And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose."

There's two ways of looking at the past. You can kind of see that in the political landscape that we inhabit. On the more conservative end of the spectrum, people regard the past as the land of giants. There were heroes of the past, who established the current conditions that we exist in. The people on the left are more concerned, perhaps, with a lineage of corruption that's come down through the centuries. Both of those perspectives are accurate. You can say, well, there were the great heroes of the past, who established our modes of being. You can think of them as composite beings, if you want. It's a perfectly reasonable way of thinking about it. You can also think of the accumulation of corruption and evil that's come along the centuries, as well. You see both of those reflected in these initial few lines: "that the sons of God"—so those are the heroes—"saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose".

And then this statement comes in as somewhat of a non sequitur: "And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years."

I looked at a variety of interpretations of that line, because it doesn't seem to follow so clearly from the previous line. Exactly what it means isn't obvious. The first line talks about the heroes of the past. The second line says, wait a second; there's something corrupt about the human mode of being. One of the consequences of that, as far as God is concerned, is that there are conditions under which the divine spirit will not strive with man. What that means is that the divine impulse towards good will abandon you because of things that you've done.

— . . . . .

The secondary consideration, here, is that, perhaps, because of the degeneration of people, it's not so obvious that our lifespans are limited—that the spirit that inhabits us will only do so for a limited amount of time. That's tangled, in a strange way, in with the idea of human moral culpability. That's posed against the notion of the giants of the past. And then the narrative returns to the giant idea, and reads: "There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown."

That's the end of that sequence of fragments. It's very broken. But you can see a dual narrative underneath it. One of the narratives is that there's the kind of corruption, lurking—despite the nature of the giants of the past—that would cause God to withhold his grace and allow men to deteriorate. That sets the stage for Noah and the flood.

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

One of the things I really didn't like about going to church when I was kid—I went to a pretty moderate church. It was the United Church, which is hardly even become a church now. It's so moderate, so to speak. One of the things I didn't like was the constant harping by the ministry on the sinful nature of human beings. It didn't speak to me properly, partly because I really didn't understand what it meant, and partly because it seemed sort of self-flagellating in an unattractive way. I don't know if there is an attractive way to be self-flagellating. There was something about it that was also rote and fake that I didn't like. But, you know, I thought about that more in later years. I started to understand that there was some real utility in asking people to keep the evil that they're doing clear and conscious in the forefront of their imagination.

I think I mentioned to you guys last week this little episode from what we know of Mesopotamian culture, surrounding the emperor and the New Year's festival. They would take the emperor outside of the walled city and strip him of his garb, so that he was reduced to just an ordinary man. And then they would humiliate him ritually and ask him how it was that, over the last year, he wasn't a spectacular embodiment of [Marduk](#). Marduk was the Mesopotamian deity who made order out of chaos, essentially. The emperor was supposed to sit and think, well, ok, I'm emperor. I should be doing a good job. Maybe I should even be doing a great job. But, probably, I'm coming up short in a bunch of ways, and

that actually happens to be important, as I'm running the entire show. I should be very, very cognizant of how I'm failing to live up to the ideal.

That is the constant clarion call—that's degenerate, I would say—in institutional Christianity. That was actually the idea: look, there's a bunch of ways that you're not being everything you could be. It's not supposed to be a whip, or to knock you down. Although, maybe it's a whip to knock down your pride—pride that stops you from being aware of your insufficiencies. It's more like a call to the opposite. It's like, well, you should stop doing those things. You could be so much more than you are. That would be so much better for you and everyone else that it's just not good that you continue breaking your own rules, let's say.

As I said, we could start this game by assuming that you should at least play the game that you're playing straight. And it is the case that, if you watch yourself... It's a terrifying thing to do, but if you watch yourself, you'll see that you lie a lot. When I learned this, to begin with, I was in my 20s. I'm a smart person, and I was very proud of that. I was also a small person, and I was moved ahead one year in school, so I was a very small person in my classes. I was also very mouthy—which might not come as much of a surprise—and somewhat provocative. I got pushed around a fair bit—because everyone gets pushed around—and my weapon was to be mouthy. It was a fairly effective weapon, although it tended to backfire. If you're effectively mouthy with large, obnoxious people, then they tend to respond in a relatively negative, physical way. That sort of thing was happening to me a fair bit. But I was quite proud of the fact that I had some intellectual power.

It was then, in my 20s, when I learned about some of the danger of that. I started to read Milton's *Paradise Lost*. I started to understand the danger of the intellect. The danger of the intellect, as far as I can tell, is that it tends towards pride and arrogance. It also tends to fall in love with its own productions. In *Paradise Lost*, that's Lucifer. Lucifer is the intellect that falls in love with its own productions, and then presumes that there's nothing outside of what it thinks. That's the totalitarian mentality: We have a total system, and we know how everything works. We are going to implement it, and that will bring about heaven on earth. That's associated with intellectual arrogance.

At the same time, another thing was happening to me. I was noticing my intellectual arrogance, and I started to understand what that meant. I also started to understand that there was more to life than the intellect—much more. I smoked too much and I drank too much and I weighed like 130 pounds. I

smoked too much, and I drank too much, and I weighed like 150 pounds. I wasn't in good physical shape. I had a lot of things to do, when I went to graduate school, to put myself together. At the same time, I was trying to understand why things had gone so crazily wrong with the world—its encapsulation in the Cold War, and what role I might be playing in that—if any—and what role any of us were playing in that. At the same time, I was working at a prison, only a little bit. I worked with this crazy psychologist. He used to put jokes on his multiple choice tests. He was a really eccentric guy. I really liked his courses. He taught a course on creativity, and he was also a prison psychologist. He was an eccentric guy. For some reason, he liked me—maybe because I was eccentric, too. He invited me to go out to the Edmonton maximum security prison with him a couple of times, which I did. That was a very interesting experience. I was trying to figure out what role each individual's behaviour bore to the pathology of the group. It was something like that.

I went out to the prison, and I met a little guy, smaller than me. I was a little bigger by then. He was a pretty innocuous guy. The prison looked like a high school—which is really quite telling, in my estimation—and I was out in the gymnasium. There were all these monsters in there, weightlifting. I remember one guy, who was tattooed everywhere. He had a huge scar running down the middle of his chest. It looked like somebody had hit him with an axe. I was in there, and I had this weird cape that I used to wear, that I'd bought in Portugal, and some boots to go along with it. Yeah...It was like a 1890s Sherlock Holmes cape. It was from the 1890s, because this little village was up on a hill. It was a walled city on a hill, and they sold these things. I don't think they'd changed the style since 1890, so I thought they were really cool. So I was wearing that, which wasn't, perhaps, the most conservative garb to don if you're going to go to a maximum security prison.

Anyways, I was in the gymnasium, and the psychologist left. God only knows... I mean, that's what he was like. All these guys came around me, and they were offering to trade their prison clothes for my cape. I was being made an offer I couldn't refuse. I didn't really know what to do. And then this little guy said something like, the psychologist sent me to come and take you away, or something like that. And so I thought, well, better this little guy than all these monsters.

We went outside the gym, into the exercise yard. We were wandering around, and he was talking to me, and he seemed like a kind of innocuous guy. And then the psychologist showed up at the door and motioned us back, which was kind of

a relief. I went into his office. He said, you know that guy that you walked out in the yard with? I said, yeah. He said, one night he took two cops and had them kneel down. While they were begging for their lives, he shot them both in the back of the head. I thought, hmph...

See, the thing that was so interesting was that he was so innocuous, right? What you'd hope is that someone like that would be very much unlike you, let's say, and certainly wouldn't be like someone innocuous that you'd met. What you'd want is that the guy would be like half werewolf and half vampire, so you could just tell right away that he was a coldblooded killer. But no. He was this sort of ineffectual, little guy, who was certainly not ineffectual if you gave him a revolver and the upper hand.

That made me think a lot about the relationship between being innocuous and being dangerous. Another thing happened—I met another guy out there. A week or two later, I heard that he and a friend of his had held another guy down and pulverized his left leg with a lead pipe. The reason for that was that they thought that he was a snitch, and maybe he was. That time, I did something different. Instead of being shocked and horrified by that—although I certainly was—I thought, how in the world could you do that? Because I didn't think I could do that. I thought that there was a qualitative distinction between me and those people. I spent about two weeks trying to see if I could figure out under what conditions I could do that—what kind of psychological transformation I would have to undergo to be able to do that. That was a meditative exercise, let's say. It only took about 10 days for me to realize that not only could I do that, but that it would be a hell of a lot easier than I had thought it would be. That's sort of where that wall between me and what Jung described as the shadow started to fall apart. That, also, was very useful; I started to treat myself as a somewhat different entity.

I thought I was a good guy, and there's no reason for me to think that. You're not a good guy unless you really made a bloody effort to be a good guy. You're just not. It's not easy. And so you're probably a moderately bad guy. That's a long ways from being an absolutely horrible guy, but it's also a long ways from being a good guy. But I had a little more respect for myself after that, because I also understood that there was a monstrous element to the human psyche that you needed to respect, and that was part of you. And I understood that you should regard yourself, in some sense, as a loaded weapon. It's very useful to regard yourself as a loaded weapon around children, because, around children, you are a loaded weapon. The terrible experiences that many children have with



you are a loaded weapon. The terrible experiences that many children have with their parents are testament to that.

Anyways, at about the same time—and I don't exactly know how these things were causally related. I guess it was because I was trying to figure out who I was and how that could be fixed. Something like that. I started to pay very careful attention to what I was saying. I don't know if that happened voluntarily or involuntarily, but I could feel a sort of split developing in my psyche. I've actually had students tell me that the same thing has happened to them after they've listened to some of the material that I've been describing to all of you. But I split into two, let's say.

One part was the old me that was talking a lot, that liked to argue, and that liked ideas. There was another part that was watching that part, just with its eyes opened, and neutrally judging. The part that was neutrally judging was watching the part that was talking, and going, that wasn't your idea; you don't really believe that; you don't really know what you're talking about; that isn't true. I thought, hm! That's really interesting! That was happening to like 95 percent of what I was saying, and then I didn't really know what to do. I thought, ok, this is strange. Maybe I fragmented, and that's just not a good thing, at all. It's not like I was hearing voices, or anything like that. It wasn't like that. People have multiple parts.

So then I had this weird conundrum: which of these two things are me? Is it the part that's listening and saying, no, that's rubbish; that's a lie; you're doing that to impress people; you're just trying to win the argument. Was that me? Or was I the part that was going about its normal, verbal business? I didn't know, but I decided that I would go with the critic. And then what I tried to do—what I learned to do, I think—was to stop saying things that made me weak. I mean, I'm still trying to do that. I'm always feeling, when I talk, whether or not the words that I am saying are making me align or making me come apart. I really do think that the alignment is the right way to conceptualize it, because if you say things as true as you can say them, then they come out of the depths inside of you. We don't know where thoughts come from. We don't know how far down into your substructure the thoughts emerge. We don't know what process of physiological alignment is necessary for you to speak from the core of your being. We don't understand any of that—we don't even conceptualize that. But I believe that you can feel that.

I learned some of that by reading [Carl Rogers](#), who's a great clinician. He talked

about mental health, in part, as the coherence between the spiritual—or the abstract—and the physical—that the two things were aligned. There's a lot of ideas of alignment in psychoanalytic and clinical thinking. But, anyways, I decided that I would start practicing not saying things that would make me weak. What happened was that I had to stop saying almost everything that I was saying—95 percent of it. That's a hell of a shock—this was over a few months—to wake up and realize that you're mostly deadwood. It's a shock. You might think, well, do you really want all of that to burn off? Well, there's nothing left but a little husk—5 percent of you. Well, if that 5 percent is solid, then maybe that's exactly what you want to have happen.

I told you that story's an elaboration of this line: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." It's a question worth asking: just exactly what are your motives? Well, maybe they're purer than mine were, and it's certainly possible. I don't think that I'm naturally a particularly good person. I think I have to work at it very, very hard. I don't necessarily think that everyone is like that. But some people are worse than that, and everyone's like that, to some degree.

So it's worth thinking about: just how much trouble are you trying to cause? The other thing you might think about is, if you're not doing something important with your life, by your own definition—because that's the game that we're playing, and you get to define the terms, at least initially—maybe you're prone to cause trouble, just because you don't have anything better to do. Trouble is more interesting than boring. That's something you learn if you read Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky knew that extraordinarily well. And so if you're not pushing yourself to the limits of your capacity, then you have plenty of leftover willpower, energy, and resources to devote to causing interesting trouble. I would also say that this is an archetypal scenario: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." That's something to meditate on.

It's not self-destructive, because it's like the diagnosis of an illness. It's like, if that does happen to be the case for you, to some degree—maybe it's only 10 percent of you, or maybe it's 90 percent—well, then coming to terms with that is excellent, because, maybe, you can stop doing it. What would be the downside to that? You'd have to give up your resentment, hatred, and all of that, obviously. That's annoying, because these emotions are easy to engage in, and

obviously. That's annoying, because those emotions are easy to engage in, and they're engaging, and they have a feeling of self-righteousness with them. But you're not doing this to put yourself down: you're doing this to separate the wheat from the chaff and to leave everything that you don't have to be, behind.

"And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them."

What's the idea? Well, the idea is that the cosmos that God created had become corrupt. That's a funny thing about Genesis that always hits me, is that that's also true. I told you that the Mesopotamians believed that human beings were made out of the blood of [Kingu](#), who was the worst monster that the dragon of chaos could imagine. That's a pretty harsh diagnosis. But the reason the Mesopotamians believed that is because they knew—as did the authors of Genesis—that human beings are the only creatures in the cosmos of being who are actually capable of conscious deceit and malevolence. The question is, to what degree does the expression of that conscious deceit and malevolence corrupt things so badly that it would be better that they didn't exist at all?

There's a story associated with a flood in the [Epic of Gilgamesh](#) that has exactly the same underlying narrative structure. In fact, some people think that the story of Noah was derived from it. The Gods, who repented of their creation, determined that erasing it would be better than allowing it to propagate. You see the same thing in the Mesopotamian creation myth, the [Enuma Elis](#). The early Gods, who are representative of the giants of humanity, I would say, make so much noise, and are so careless, that the original creator God, Tiamat, decides to wipe them from the face of the earth.

When you read something like this, if you read it from an informed, historical perspective, it starts to have a depth that makes it transcend this archaic and fairytale-like element of the story. I've read some very terrible things about what happened in Nazi Germany, and what happened when the Japanese invaded China, and just what happened generally in the history of mankind. Things can get so bad that it takes the imagination of a very bad person to conceptualize them. When they get that bad, this is the only kind of language that works to describe them.

That's another thing that I've discovered by working with my clinical clients:

when their lives are really not going well—when they're close to suicide, or when they're close to homicide, or when there are things going on in the family that are so corrupt and terrible that they reach back generations and are aimed at nothing but misery and destruction—the only language that suffices has a religious tone. There's nothing else available to describe what's happening with the proper level of seriousness. It might be that you've never encountered a situation that required that level of seriousness. But that doesn't mean that those situations don't exist. They exist. You generally do everything you can to avoid being ensconced in them, but they certainly do exist. The probability that you'll encounter a situation like that, or two, at some point in your life is extraordinarily high. You'll tangle with someone who's malevolent right to the core, and maybe it'll be you that is malevolent. That'll be a big shock. And then these poetic descriptors start to become much more real.

"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, And Noah walked with God."

That's an interesting line. If you remember back in the story of Adam and Eve, what happened to Adam—once he ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, woke up, the scales fell from his eyes, he became self-conscious, and he developed the knowledge of good and evil—is that he won't walk with God when God calls him in the garden. And so Noah is Adam without the fall, essentially. There's something that Noah's doing right, that motivates God to spare him—or maybe to show him a pathway through the emerging chaos. Something like that. That's worth thinking about, a lot.

There will be situations in your life where what you face is the emergent chaos. Maybe that will be some terrible catastrophe inside your family, or maybe it will be something that's occurring on a much broader social level, but chaos is coming. Unless you want to be a denizen of the chaos, or even a contributor to it—and perhaps that is what you want; many people under those circumstances choose that—what you're going to want to know is how to build an ark and get through it. If you're interested in life, and if you're interested in proper being, and if you're disinclined to produce any more suffering than necessary, then you want to know how to conduct yourself when the catastrophe comes, so that you have a reasonable possibility of moving through it and starting anew.

When this old story says, well, God's not happy, and he's going to wipe everything out, it's like, you might want to take that seriously. And then when it

says, but there was one person who had a mode of being that protected him from that, that's also something that you might want to take seriously. You might want to know what that being is—you might need to use it. These sorts of things are practical in the deepest possible sense. They're real in the deepest possible sense, and practical in the deepest practical sense. So Noah walked with God.

I'm going to switch way ahead, here. I said at the beginning of the lecture series that the Bible is a hyperlinked text, and everything refers to everything else. There's utility in reading it in linear order, but it's not a linear document. There's an infinite number of pathways that you can use to walk through it. All of the document expands upon and refers to all of the rest of the document. And so I'm going to switch to the [Sermon on the Mount](#), which I think is probably the key document in the New Testament. I'm going to switch to it because I think it's the closest thing we have to a fully articulated description of what it would mean to walk with God, so that you're in the ark when the flood comes. It's the most fully articulated realization of that idea that leaps out of the metaphorical. If I say, well, you should conduct yourself like Noah, walk with God, and build an ark, obviously those are poetic and metaphorical suggestions. It's not that easy to bring them into practice. There's a big distance between you and the archetype. It isn't obvious how to manifest it in your own life. What has to happen is the archetype has to be differentiated and articulated so that it becomes sufficiently practical and personal, so that you can actually implement it.

I'm going to take apart some of the Sermon on the Mount. It starts in Matthew 5, and I'm not going to talk about Matthew 5. I'm going to talk about the end of Matthew 6 and most of Matthew 7.

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" Those are famous lines, and that's sort of Christ the hippy. It's like, hey, let it all hang out—that's an old phrase. Do your thing, and everything will come to you. These lines have been interpreted in that manner many times. But that's seriously not the proper interpretation, because there's a kicker with this injunction. The kicker is this: "for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

shall be added unto you.

That's a lot different than the hippy thing, right? There's a very, very, very interesting idea, here. It's certainly one of the most profound ideas that I've ever encountered. The idea is that, if you configure your life so that what you are genuinely doing is aiming at the highest possibly good, then the things that you need to survive and thrive on a day-to-day basis will deliver themselves to you. That's a hypothesis, and it's not some simple hypothesis. What it basically says is, if you dare to do the most difficult thing that you can conceptualize, your life will work out better than it will if you do anything else. Well, how are you going to find out if that's true?

It's a [Kierkegaardian](#) leap of faith. There's no way you're going to find out whether or not that's true unless you do it. No one can tell you, either: working for someone else is no proof that it will work for you. You have to be all-in in this game. The idea is, "seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." It's like, that's actually a fairly important caution when you're talking about not having to pay attention to what you're going to eat or what you're going to wear. What it's essentially saying is that those problems are trivial in comparison. The probability—if you manifest yourself properly in the world—that those things will come your way is extraordinarily high. I believe that's exactly right. I've watched people operate in the world, and I would say that there is no more effective way of operating in the world than to conceptualize the highest good that you can and then strive to attain it. There's no more practical pathway to the kind of success that you could have if you actually knew what success was. That's what this sermon is attempting to posit.

It's like in the story of Pinocchio. What happens at the beginning of the story of Pinocchio is that Geppetto wishes on a star. We talked about that a little bit. Geppetto aligns himself with the metaphorical manifestation of the highest good he can conceptualize. He makes a commitment, let's say. He aims at the star. For him, the star is the possibility that he can take his creation—a puppet, whose strings are being pulled by unseen forces—and have it transform into something that's autonomous and real. Well, that's a hell of an ambition. We're wise enough to put that in a children's movie but too foolish to understand what it means.

It's such an interesting juxtaposition that we can both know that and not know it at the same time. You can go to the movie; you can watch it, and it makes sense. But that doesn't mean that you can go home, and think, I know what that meant.

Well, people are complicated. We exist at different levels, and all of the levels don't communicate with one another. But the movie is a hypothesis, and the hypothesis is that there is no better pathway to self-realization and the ennoblement of being than to posit the highest good that you can conceive of and commit yourself to it. And then you might also ask yourself—and this is definitely worth asking—do you really have anything better to do? And if you don't, why would you do anything else?

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

I spent a long time trying to figure out what that meant, too, because it's not one of those lines that can easily be read as pro-grasshopper and anti-ant—you know, the old fable of the grasshopper and the ant. I'm not going to tell it, but the ant works, and the grasshopper fiddles. The ant has a pretty good time in the winter; the grasshopper dies. This is like a pro-grasshopper line, but it's not. It says something else. It says that, if you orient yourself properly and then pay attention to what you do every day, that works. I actually think that that's in accordance with what we have come to understand about human perception. What happens is that the world shifts itself around your aim. You're a creature that has an aim. You have to have an aim in order to do something. You're an aiming creature. You look at a point, and you move towards it. It's built right into you. And so you have an aim.

Let's say your aim is the highest possible aim. Well, that sets up the world around you. It organizes all of your perceptions, and it organizes what you see and what you don't see; it organizes your emotions and motivations. So you organize yourself around that aim. Then what happens is that the day manifests itself as a set of challenges and problems, and if you solve them properly, then you stay on the pathway towards that aim. You can concentrate on the day. That way you get to have your cake and eat it, too, because you can point into the far distance and live in the day. It seems to me that that makes every moment of the day supercharged with meaning. If everything that you're doing, every day, is related to the highest possible aim that you could conceptualize...Well, that's the very definition of the meaning that would sustain your life.

Back to Noah. All hell's about to break loose, and chaos is coming. When that's happening in your life, you might want to be doing something that you regard as truly worthwhile. That's what will keep you afloat when everything is flooded. And you don't want to wait until the flood comes to start doing that: if your ark's

half built and you don't have a captain, the probability is very high that you'll drown.

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." That's not a particularly optimistic formulation.

"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgement yet judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

It's a sensible description. I wouldn't call it a piece of advice, because I don't think that any of this is advice: it's a description of the structure of reality. That's not the same as advice. It basically says that you'll be held accountable by the rules of the game that you choose to play. That, I also think, is perfectly in keeping with the understanding of human psychology. You have to play a game that other people will allow you to play, will cooperate with you while you're playing, and will compete with you while you're playing it. You have a fair bit of flexibility in setting up the parameters of the game. But you don't have any choice about whether or not you're going to be in a game. You're in a game, and you're going to be held accountable by the rules of the game. That's how the game works. You might want to pick a game by which rules you would be willing to be held accountable.

"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?"

You might be wondering what a beam is. A mote is a dust speck, and a beam is a very large piece of lumber. And so the issue is not so much the blindness of others—even though there's as much blindness among others as there is for you. The issue, here—the description, here—is that you should be concerned about what's interfering with your own vision, first. You should leave other people the hell alone in relationship to that. And so, if your mode of being in the world is such that you want others to act better to improve things for you—or if you identify the evil and the catastrophe as something that's outside, that someone else needs to fix, or that someone else is responsible for—then you're not going to fix that. You're going to remain blind to the things that you're doing and not doing that make things not go well. And so it's just better to think, right, I'm probably blind in many, many ways. Maybe there are some ways that I can rectify that



really bad.

It's highly probable that you're blind in all sorts of ways. In fact, it's virtually certain, and so it's just more useful to think, how is it that I'm wrong in this situation? I'll tell you something that I learned to do when I was already with my wife, which happened frequently. When you actually communicate with people, you find out that there are many things you don't agree on. That's because you're actually different creatures. If you're actually going to have a truthful conversation, then you're going to find out that you don't see things the same way. Then you can either pretend that's not the case and gloss over it, and then end up in a 30-year, silent war, or you can have the damn fight when you need to have it and see if you can straighten it out.

Now and then we would get in a situation when we were at [loggerheads](#); we couldn't move. It would spiral up into hate speech, let's say. Yeah. Everyone laughs, because they know they manifest plenty of hate speech towards those they love. So one of the things we learned to do was, when we hit an impasse, was to separate and go our own ways, and sit, and think, ok, we're at this unpleasant situation. We can't figure out how to move forward. I'd always think, of course it's her fault. Obviously it's her fault—at least 95 percent. But maybe there was something I did that contributed like 5 percent to it. I would sit and think, and ask myself a question: Is there anything I did in the last 6 months that increased the probability that this impasse would manifest itself? I'll tell you, you have no idea how fast your mind will generate an answer to a question like that. There's undoubtedly some idiotic thing that you did, that you know, that you remember, that increased the probability that you're going to have your hands around the throat of the person that you love. And then you can go tell them that. And then you can have a conversation—especially if they do the same thing. You say, look, here's how I'm an idiot in this situation. The other person says, well, yeah. Here's how I'm an idiot. Then you're two idiots, and then maybe you can have a conversation.

"Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." It's hard to argue with that. "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that knocketh shall find; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

That sounded pretty optimistic. But, again, I think it's a description of the structure of existential reality. When I'm in my clinical practice, I observe—this

is also the case with my students—that people's lives aren't what they would like them to be. So then you ask, why? Well, forget about tragedy and catastrophe. That's self-evident. We're not going to discuss that, although the degree to which you bring about your own tragedy is always indeterminate. But I would never say that every terrible thing that is visited on a person is something they deserve. I think that's a very dangerous presupposition, especially because everyone gets sick and dies.

One of the main reasons that people don't get what they want is because they don't actually figure out what it is. And the probability that you're going to get what would be good for you, let's say—which would even be better than what you want. You might be wrong about what you want, easily. But maybe you could get what would really be good for you. Well, why don't you? Well, because you don't try. You don't think, ok, here's what I would like if I could have it. I don't mean in a way that you manipulate the world to force it to deliver you goods or status, or something like that. That isn't what I mean. I mean, something like, imagine that you were taking care of yourself like you were someone you actually cared for. And then you thought, ok, I'm caring for this person. I would like for things to go as well for them as possible. What would their life have to be like in order for that to be the case?

People don't do that. They don't sit down and think, all right, let's figure it out. You've got a life that's hard, obviously. Three years from now you can have what you need. You got to be careful about it. You can't have everything. You can have what would be good for you, but you have to figure out what it is. And then you have to aim at it. Well, my experience with people has been that, if they figure out what it is that would be good for them, and then they aim at it, then they get it.

It's a strange thing. It's not that simple. You may formulate an idea about what would be good for you, and then you take 10 steps towards that, and then you find out that your formulation was a bit off, so you have to reformulate your goal. You're kind of zigzagging as you move towards the goal. But a huge part of the reason that people fail is because they don't ever set up the criteria for success. And so, since success is a very narrow line and very unlikely, the probability that you're going to stumble on it randomly is zero. And so there's a proposition, here. The proposition is, if you actually want something, you can have it. The question, then, would be, well, what do you mean by actually want? And the answer is that you reorient your life in every possible way to make the probability that that will occur as certain as possible.

probably that that will seem as certain as possible.

That's a sacrificial idea, right? You don't get everything. Obviously. But maybe you can have what you need. And maybe all you have to do to get it is ask. But asking isn't a whim, or today's wish: you have to be deadly serious about it. You have to think, ok, I'm taking stock of myself. If I was going to live properly in the world, and if I was going to set myself up such that being would justify itself in my estimation—and I don't mean as a harsh judge—exactly what is it that I would aim at? Well, one of the things I've found is that—in test of this theory, let's say...You could try this. This is a form of prayer. Sit on your bed one day and ask yourself, what remarkably stupid things am I doing on a regular basis to absolutely screw up my life? And if you actually ask the question—but you have to want to know the answer, right? That's actually what asking the question means. It doesn't mean just mouthing the words. It means you have to decide that you want to know. You'll figure that out so fast that it'll make your hair curl.

Jung thought about this. He thought that people had two poles of consciousness. One was the individual consciousness that we each identify with. The other was something he called the [Self](#). You might think of the Self as the divine within. That's a close enough approximation. It's the universal part of your consciousness—it's your conscience. That's another way of thinking about it, whatever your conscience is. But it's something that you can consult.

It's like the Socratic [daemon](#). Socrates said that the thing that made him different from everyone else in Greece was that he consulted his daemon, his genius. He asked himself how it was that he should conduct himself in the world, and then he did that, whatever it was. He didn't try to force a solution. He didn't try to force a solution selfishly. He asked: I'm going to manifest myself in the best possible manner in the world. I would like to do that. What would that be? Well, you're perfectly capable of thinking—God only knows how. You're perfectly capable of immense feats of imagination, dream, and fantasy. God only knows how you do all of that. What would happen if you consulted yourself about the best possible outcome for you? You might get an answer. Well, that's what this proposition is.

"Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

This is a question about the fundamental nature of being, I suppose. One of the hypotheses in the New Testament—which is a different hypothesis, in some sense, than the one that structures the Old Testament—is that faith makes being good. It's a very interesting proposition, so the notion would be—and it's an action-oriented issue, as well. You act out the proposition that, if you act properly in the world, that being will reveal itself to you as benevolent. But you will never know unless you do it. So this is a call to that. Act out the proposition that, if you act properly, that being itself is benevolent. There's no reason to assume the contrary. To assume the contrary would be to be as cynical and bitter as possible. It's not like we don't have reason for that; it's not like I don't understand why that happens to people.

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

That's a reciprocity issue, right? This is another thing I learned from Jung. Jung reversed this. This is the [Golden Rule](#), and it's often read as, be nice to other people. It's like, that is not what this rule means. It doesn't mean that even a little bit. It means something like—and we'll reverse it so that it concentrates on you rather than on the other person, to begin with. It means something like, conceptualize how things could be great—if they were great for you, if you were taking care of yourself—and then work to make that the case for everyone else.

You see that in Buddhism. Buddha reached nirvana. That's the theory. He was tempted with the offer to stay there. He rejected that offer, and came back to the profane world. He felt that the attainment of nirvana was insufficient unless everyone attained it simultaneously. It's something like that. It's to treat yourself properly. That's a hard thing to do, because you're a fallen, shameful, cowardly, deceitful, malevolent, mortal creature. And so it's not easy, and you know it. It's not easy to treat something like that properly.

It isn't obvious that people treat themselves better than they treat other people. I don't think that's obvious, at all. But, maybe, you could start with yourself, and think, ok, I'm going to take care of myself as if I have value. What would that look like? And then I'm going to work to extend that courtesy to everyone else. The hypothesis here is that, if you take all of the moral wisdom that mankind has generated over its millennia of struggle, evolved and then manifested in metaphors and stories, and then codified into articulated law, and you pick one principle that dominated all of that, this would be the principle.

It's interesting, too, because it's "the law and the prophets." The law is the rule, but the prophets are the process by which the rules are being updated. And so the prophets are superordinate, in some sense, to the law. The proposition that's set forth in this particular statement is that this maxim, which is to optimize your own mode of being and then to work to do the same for everyone around you, is not only the thing that's at the core of the law, but it's at the core of the process that generates and updates the law. It's a hell of a thing for someone to say.

"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction."

Well, who in the world could possibly argue with that? Everyone in their right mind knows that there's a million ways of doing things wrong. There's one way, if you're lucky, to do things right. And so the notion that it's a very, very narrow pathway that you tread up if you're doing things right—that's wisdom. That's the line between chaos and order that you're supposed to be on, constantly. It's a very, very thin line. If you're a little bit too far in one direction, then it's too much chaos, and if you're a little too far in the other direction, then it's too much order. Both of those aren't good. The balance has to be exactly right. You can feel that. I truly believe you can feel that, and I think it's your deepest instinct. I mean that biologically; I don't mean that metaphorically. I think that your psyche is arranged to exist in a cosmos that's composed of chaos and order. I think that's why you have the hemispheric structure that you have. This is deeper than metaphor.

When you feel as if you're meaningfully engaged in the world, when the terror of your mortality strips away, when you're engaged, and it's timeless, that's the deepest instinct that you have, telling you that you're in the right place at the right time. And then what you do is practice being there. That narrow spot that's so difficult to find—you wander around it. Maybe, if you're lucky, you can watch. This is an experiment. Watch yourself for two weeks like you don't know who you are, because you don't. Notice that there's gonna be times when things array properly for you. It's not easy to notice, because, when they're arrayed like that, you're so engaged that you don't exactly notice. But you'll say, I'm in the right place. How did I get here? What am I doing right? How is it that this could happen more often? I'd like this to happen more often. How would I have to conduct myself for that to happen more often? And then you practice that. Maybe, instead of 10 minutes a month or 10 minutes a week, it's like 15 minutes a day, and then it's half an hour a day, and then it's an hour a day, and then it's four hours a day. And then, maybe, if you're extraordinarily careful, you get to a

four hours a day. And then, maybe, if you're extraordinarily careful, you get to a point where you're like that a good proportion of the time.

"Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." That's particularly good advice for today's political situation, I can tell you. "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit." Well, that's what I learned from studying the history of totalitarianism in the 20th century: that a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit, and that's for sure.

It's so funny. People think about their relationship with divinity and God in a primitive and childish way. Why can't a miracle just manifest itself, so that I would be convinced? The funny thing is, first of all, you wouldn't be. If a miracle actually happened, you would actually forget about it in about six months. You think that's not true, but it's true. You would actually forget about it, because that's what people are like. But there are negative miracles that are happening all the time, which actually lends some credence to my supposition. You don't pay any attention to that. If we can't learn from what happened in the 20th century, then we're absolutely incapable of learning. What happened in the 20th century was as bitter a set of lessons as you could possibly imagine.

It's associated precisely with this: "a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire."

Well, that's a flood motif, right there: the constant archetype of the tree. That's the archetype of being. It's the archetype of the Self, often. What's the warning, here? If you're mostly deadwood, you're going to burn up. You can think about that metaphysically. You can project that into eternity, and you think about that as a form of hell. The funny is that, when that's happening to you in realtime, it is like an eternity in hell. It's a perfectly reasonable way of thinking about it, but you can strip the metaphysical elements off, and you can say, well, if you're mostly deadwood, then a spark will light you on fire. That's also very much worth thinking about.

"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my

Father which is in heaven."

That's an interesting line, I think. One of the proper critiques of traditional Christianity—this is the sort of critique that Nietzsche put forward—was that Christianity had degenerated in its moral mission. Jung was a little bit more sympathetic, and I'll tell you why in a minute. Nietzsche's idea was that Christianity had lost its way when it generated the presupposition that humanity was saved, in some final sense, by the sacrifice of Christ. It meant that the work was already done. I'm being harsh in my judgement for the purpose of rhetorical simplification, but the idea was that, if you just professed faith that that had already occurred, then you were granted eternal salvation.

Well, it's not so straightforward, and I think that's what this line actually represents. It says, well, how do you enter into the kingdom of heaven? Again, you can think about that under the aspect of eternity, or you can think about it as a psychological statement. The answer is quite straightforward. It's that you do what Noah did to make him immune from the flood, and that's to walk with God. That's what this sermon is about. It's laying out the practical elements of that. The practical elements are to aim at the highest possible good, play that out in the world, and then you may have the opportunity to inhabit the highest possible good that you're positing into existence. Perhaps not, but you can't think of a more practical way of going about that.

If you build a house, then maybe you can live in it. If you don't build a house, you're not going to be able to live in it. If you build a good house, then you'll be able to live in a good house. If you build a perfect house, then maybe you can live in a perfect house. But if you just say that the house has already been built for you... Well, then the probability that you'll be able to live where you need to live is... There's no probability that you'll be able to live where you need to live.

"Many will say to me in that day"—that's judgement day—"Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

That's judgement day. That's an archetypal idea. Partly it's archetypal because every day is judgement day. The part of you that's equivalent to the logos, the part of you that's your own ideal, sits in eternal judgement on your iniquity. That's the source of guilt, shame, withdrawal, and then resentment, murderousness, and genocide. It's because you can intuit the ideal. The problem

with intuiting the ideal is that an ideal is always a judge. There is no difference between an ideal and a judge, and so you're eternally judged by your own ideal. If you have no ideal, then you've got no direction and no meaning in your life. And, of course, the more extreme the ideal, the harsher the judge.

Jung was very curious about why the [Book of Revelation](#) was tacked onto the Bible, because the Book of Revelation is a very weird book. In the gospels, Christ is, I would say, perhaps, primarily merciful. There's a war in his character between truth and mercy, but it's one of the two—perhaps mercy. Jung's observation was that the gospel Christ was too merciful, and that's why the Book of Revelation was tacked onto the New Testament. In the Book of Revelation, Christ, who's the transcendent ideal and above the pyramid, is nothing but a judge, and everyone fails. Of course, the ultimate ideal is the ultimate judge. That's the archetypal reality, there. You can say, well, I don't want to be judged, and so I'll dispense with the ideal. But then you're Cain. Cain is exactly the person who dispenses with the ideal. There's no escaping from it. There's no escaping from eternal judgement. That's the archetypal story.

People put a lot of work into these representations, and there's thousands of them. They weren't messing around. These are serious pieces of work. We don't understand them, but that doesn't mean that the people who created them didn't know what they were doing. The people who created these pieces of work were geniuses. It's not like they understood in an articulated manner exactly what they were trying to represent. But what they were representing were the metaphors at the core of our culture—to the degree that our culture is functional and good. These are the metaphors upon which it's founded, and they're not for the faint of heart.

You say, religion is the opiate of the masses. It's like, yeah? Then how do you explain this, exactly? Because if it was opiates you're after, you might just get rid of that panel. The other thing that's so interesting about the proposition—look at Revelations, and look at the judgement. Almost everyone ends up on the right side of this panel. So if you are just conjuring up some sort of pathetic wish fulfillment, why in the world would you tilt the scales in that manner? You think that's supposed to make people feel good? I don't think so. There's almost nothing about this picture that should make people feel good. If you understand it properly, it should terrify you to the depths of your soul. That's what the picture is for.

"Therefore whoever heareth these sayings of mine. and doeth them. I will liken



him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell, and great was its collapse.

"And it came to pass"—this is a very interesting line. Now and then—this particularly happens in Biblical settings—you run across lines that you cannot believe actually exist. You cannot imagine how someone could have imagined up and conjured up the line. These two lines are like that, as far as I'm concerned: "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

That was another thing that I didn't really appreciate about the Churches that I attended: the lessons were taught by scribes, and the words were mouthed, but there was no power in them. There was no meaning in them. It was like when I was 20 years old and I was saying all these things I didn't mean. They were words that sounded good. They were like gilded cloth, I suppose, that you can wrap around yourself, but there's no substance to them. There's a big difference between listening to something that has substance and listening to something that is spoken because it sounds like it should sound good.

This line says that whoever spoke the lines that we just described was someone who sounded like he knew what he was talking about, and not someone who was just repeating something for the sake of sounding good. It certainly seems to me that the lines that we just reviewed have the awesome impact of authority.

Back to Noah. "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God. And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth."

Have you seen the [new NRA ad](#)? You might want to look that up. I would say that's the most shocking manifestation of political polarization in the United States that I've yet seen. Most of it I've seen on the left—what's shocked me mostly has been on the left. But the new NRA ad...That's a whole new thing.

It's this attractive woman doing a voiceover. She kind of looks like Demi

Moore, but she's kind of tough looking, and she has contempt on her face. That's a dangerous thing. In the background, there's nothing but images of [Antifa](#) riots, Berkley riots, fire, and protests. She's describing that as a conspiracy, essentially—a conspiracy that involves the intellectual elite, including Hollywood, which is named. The accusation is that there's a cabal of corrupt intellectuals, let's say, who are bringing the country to its knees, and it's time to get your goddamn guns. Look up the ad and see what you think.

There's lots of people who would be perfectly happy if that was the direction in which we were headed. One of the things that I'm hoping is that we might be able to talk our way through it. But we're in a situation where every act of individual idiocy will push us one iota closer to the brink. That will make the 15 percent of the population—or 30 percent of the population—who would love to see everything degenerate into chaos perfectly happy, because that's their aim.

"The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh has corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

"Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits.

"A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it. And, behold, I, even I, do bring a food of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die. But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee."

That's a fairly optimistic twist on the story: not only is it Noah, but he gets to save his whole family, and down a couple of generations. That's a good thing to think about.

I had this client, and she had a very hard upbringing—not a lot of encouragement, to say the least. Let's say, a lot of discouragement. She had a

son, and what was really interesting about her in relationship to her son was that she refused to do to her son all the things that she could have learned to do to him—given her extensive experience with being made as miserable as possible by someone who was hellbent on bringing her to her knees. She learned the opposite lesson, from all her misery and torment, which was not to move that forward down the generations. So the idea, here, is that, if you walk properly, aim properly, act properly, and act with God in the manner that we've been discussing, perhaps that isn't only for you. Perhaps it's also the thing that will save your family. And then, by implication, perhaps it will also save society.

That's exactly what happens with Noah. First it's him, and then it's his family, but everything else goes. By acting properly and saving himself and his family, he actually saves the world. The most profound people that I've read, who've meditated deeply on the problem of, say, totalitarian catastrophe—and I would put [Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn](#) at the top of that list. His entire corpus—three volumes, 700 pages long, each in tiny type—is a long scream about the absolute necessity of individual honesty and ethical behaviour as the only bulwark against totalitarian catastrophe. I've read many writers who've attempted to diagnose the problems of the 20th century. I think Solzhenitsyn came to the same conclusions that [Viktor Frankl](#) came to as a consequence of his experiences in the Nazi concentration camps.

I'm also an admirer of Frankl, but Solzhenitsyn takes it to an entirely different level of profundity and makes an extraordinarily strong case that not only do societies deteriorate because the people within the societies become individually corrupt, but that the only way to stave that off is for the individuals within that society to reject that corruption, in the confines of their own personal lives. He tells endless stories of people that he met in the Gulag—the work camps, the death camps, in the Soviet Union—who were so incredibly tough that even under the most possible extreme conditions there wasn't a chance that they were going to step off that straight and narrow line. There was nothing the authorities could do to move them. Just watching that was enough to transform Solzhenitsyn. Of course, one of the things he wondered was—after spending a good amount of time in the work camps—well, just exactly how did I get here? And it wasn't, well, it was Hitler's fault, and it was Stalin's fault—although, it was definitely the fault of both of them. For Solzhenitsyn, it was also his fault, because he's playing the same game. He just wasn't as good at it.

"And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after

ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive."

There's another message in the story, which is that it isn't only Noah, his family, and human society that's dependent on Noah's appropriate actions in the world. It's the entire living planet. In an era of excessive, extreme, and generally disingenuous environmental catastrophizing, that's something to consider very seriously.

Perhaps there's nothing better that you can do, for everything, all things considered, including those things that are outside the confines of human society, than to get your act together and align yourself properly along all of the dimensions of your being, from the tiniest microcosm to the ultimate macrocosm. That's the way that all being is redeemed. That's what the story suggests. As cynical, modern people, we read it as if it was written by primitive people, who thought that it was really the case that someone could build a boat and put two of every kind into it, and thereby save the world. It's embarrassing to see something interpreted in a manner that shallow—especially by people who don't have ignorance as a justification.

These stories have to appeal to everyone, right? And there's lots of people in the world who aren't very bright. And so they tend to take things concretely—like how a child would take things concretely if you read them a story. And the story can be taken concretely, but it has to be, because the stories have to be for everyone. But, if you're sophisticated, that doesn't mean that you should dismiss it as if it was written for a child. Maybe you have the obligation to look a bit deeper and think for a moment that it wouldn't be conserved for these many of thousands of years if there wasn't something more to it than a casual, intellectual dismissal would indicate.

"And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather it to thee; and it shall be for food for thee, and for them. Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he. And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation. Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth. "For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made

will I destroy from off the face of the earth. And Noah did according unto all that the Lord commanded him. And Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth. And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the flood. Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creepeth upon the earth, there went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah. And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth. "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth for forty days and forty nights. In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark; they, and every beast after his kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort. And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life."

That makes Noah the ultimate shepherd—tender of the garden, and shepherd of all things. That's a hell of a role, and maybe that's the one that keeps you afloat during the flood.

"And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the Lord shut him in. And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and care up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth. And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered. "And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man: All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died. And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark. And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days. "And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters assuaged; the fountains also of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained; and the waters returned from off the earth

rain from heaven was restrained, and the waters returned from off the earth continually: and after the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters were abated. "And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat. And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month: in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, were the tops of the mountains seen. And it came to pass at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made: And he sent forth a raven, which went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth. "Also he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground; but the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth: then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark. And he stayed yet other seven days; and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; and the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf pluckt off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth. "And he stayed yet other seven days; and sent forth the dove; which returned not again unto him any more. And it came to pass in the sixth hundredth and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth: and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry. And in the second month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dried. And God spake unto Noah, saying, Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee. "Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth. And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him: every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark. "And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar."—an immediate return to the sacrificial motif—"And the Lord smelled a sweet savour"—that's Noah's proper sacrifice—"and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease. "And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiple, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea: into your hand are they delivered "

fishes of the sea, into your hand are they delivered.

I've heard commentators—David Suzuki, for example—claim that the substructure of Western culture, in lines such as this, deliver the earth over to human beings and justify our ravaging of being. I don't think that's a very careful reading. It seems to me that, given the importance of such matters, a very close reading is actually necessary.

In the story of Adam and Eve, when Adam and Eve are thrown out of the garden, God tells Eve that she's going to be subordinated to her husband. He doesn't say that that's what should happen: he says that's what's going to happen. The same thing, as far as I'm concerned, is contained in lines like this. It isn't necessarily that this is something that should happen. It's something that did happen. It's quite remarkable, how long ago these lines were penned. It wasn't obvious until, perhaps, the 1960s that we had dominated the earth so completely that its very future existence was in our hands. That's a prophetic element of this tale.

"And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, and upon all that moves upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea. Unto your hand are they delivered." That's exactly right. "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man."

This is a hard section to interpret. It means, something like, God describes the dominion over the planet that revived humanity will have, and notes the power that goes along with that, and then puts a limitation on it. The limitation is to maintain the sanctity of life, despite your power. Although it's not easy to extract from the manner in which this has been translated, what God is telling Noah is that, if you kill yourself, if you kill someone else, and if an animal kills a human being, there will be a price to pay for that. So there's an opportunity, which is that the descendants of Noah can dominate the earth. But there's a moral limitation placed on that, which is, nonetheless, life itself is to be regarded as sanctified and sacred.

"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man. And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth

abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein. And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; and with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you, neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. "And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh."

There's a negotiated agreement, of sorts. The negotiated agreement is, as far as I can tell, to the degree that humanity agrees to act in the manner of Noah, then the threat of catastrophic destruction will remain at bay.

"And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth... This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth..."

So that's a good place to stop. There's no lecture next week, by the way, because the theater was booked. There'll be a one week break. When we get back, we'll finish the story of Noah—there's not much left of it—talk about the Tower of Babel, which is a very short story but a very, very interesting one, and then we'll move on to the story of Abraham. Thank you very much for coming. We'll see you in two weeks.



## VIII: The Phenomenology of the Divine

Hello everyone. Thank you, again, for showing up. Tonight, we're going to finish off the story of Noah and the story of the Tower of Babel—I don't think that'll take very long—and then we're going to turn to the Abrahamic stories. They're a very complex set of stories. They sit between the earliest stories in Genesis—that, I would say, end with the Tower of Babel—and the stories of Moses, which are extraordinarily well developed. There's a whole sequence of Abrahamic stories—multiple stories, conjoined together. I found them very daunting. They are very difficult to understand. I'm going to stumble through them the best that I can. That's probably the best way to think about this. They have a narrative content that's quite strange.

I was reading a book while doing this, called [The Disappearance of God](#), that I found quite helpful. The author of that book argues that God is very manifest at the beginning of the Old Testament, in terms of personal appearances, even. That proclivity fades away as the Old Testament develops. There's a parallel development that's, maybe, causally linked—I'm not exactly sure how to conceptualize it—to the stories about individuals becoming more and more well developed. It's as if, as God fades away, so to speak, the individual becomes more and more manifest.

There's a statement in the Old Testament—the location of which I don't recall, but I'll tell you about it in future lectures—where God tells whoever he's speaking with that he's going to disappear, let man go his own way, and see what happens. Not a complete disappearance, but maybe a transformation into something that modern people regard more as a psychological phenomena, rather than the objective entity that God seems to be in the beginning of the Biblical stories.

I've been wrestling with that a lot. The notion that God appears to Abraham multiple times... That's not a concept that's easy for modern people to grasp. For us—generally speaking, apart from, say, issues of faith—God isn't something who makes himself personally manifested in our lives. He doesn't appear to us. That's, I suppose, why the question of belief is so paramount for modern people. I presume that, if God was in the habit of appearing to you, you likely wouldn't have a problem with belief. It might be more complicated than that, but that's how it seems to me.

And so, when we read stories about God making himself manifest, either to a nation, say, in the case of Israel, or to individuals, it's not easy to understand why people would write stories like that, if they thought like we thought. It wasn't that long ago that the Bible was written. From a biological perspective, it was really only yesterday—a couple of thousand years, four thousand years, or something like that. That's not very long ago. From a biological perspective, it's nothing. The first thing I tried to do was to see if I could figure out how to understand that. So I'll start the lecture once we finish the remains of the story of Noah. I'll start the lecture with an attempt to situate the Abrahamic stories in a context that might make them more accessible—at least, a context that works for me to make them more accessible.

Let's conclude the Noah story. When we ended last time, the ark had come to its resting place. Noah and his family had debarked. This is the story of what occurs immediately afterwards. It's a very short story, but I think it's very relevant. Both of these stories, including the Tower of Babel, are very relevant for our current times.

"And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham is the father of Canaan. These are the three sons of Noah: and of them was the whole earth overspread. And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard. And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. "And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. "And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servants. And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years: and he died. And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech."

I remember thinking about this story 30 years ago. I think the meaning of the story stood out for me. When you read complicated materials, sometimes, a piece of complicated material will stand out, for some reason. It's like it glitters, I suppose. That might be one way of thinking about it. You're in sync with it,

and you can understand what it means. I really experienced that reading the [Dao De Jing](#), which is this document that I would really like to do a lecture on, at some point. I don't understand some of the verses, but others stand right out, and I can understand them.

I think I understood what this part of the story of Noah meant. We talked a little bit about what nakedness meant in the story of Adam and Eve. The idea, essentially, was that, to know yourself naked is to become aware of your vulnerability—your physical boundaries in time and space and your fundamental, physiological insufficiencies as they might be judged by others. There's biological insufficiency that's built into you, because you're a fragile, mortal, vulnerable, half insane creature, and that's just an existential truth. And then, of course, merely as a human being—even with all those faults—there are faults that you have that are particular to you, that might be judged harshly by the group... Well, will definitely be judged harshly by the group. And so to become aware of your nakedness is to become self-conscious, to know your limits, and to know your vulnerability. That's what is revealed to Ham when he comes across his father naked.

The question is, what does it mean to see your father naked? And especially in an inappropriate manner, like this. It's as if Ham... He does the same thing that happens in the Mesopotamian creation myth, when Tiamat and Apsu give rise to the first Gods, who are the father of the eventual deity of redemption: Marduk. The first Gods are very careless and noisy, and they kill Apsu, their father, and attempt to inhabit his corpse. That makes Tiamat enraged. She bursts forth from the darkness to do them in. It's like a precursor to the flood story, or an analog to the flood story.

I see the same thing happening, here, with Ham. He's insufficiently respectful of his father. The question is, exactly what does the father represent? You could say, well, there's the father that you have: a human being, a man among men. But then there's the Father as such, and that's the spirit of the Father. Insofar as you have a father, you have both at the same time: you have the personal father, a man among other men—just like anyone other's father—but insofar as that man is your father, that means that he's something different than just another person. What he is, is the incarnation of the spirit of the Father. To disrespect that carelessly...

Noah makes a mistake, right? He produces wine and gets himself drunk. You might say well if he's sprawled out there for everyone to see it's hardly Ham's

might say, well, if he's sprawled out there for everyone to see, it's hardly Ham's fault, if he stumbles across him. But the book is laying out a danger. The danger is that, well, maybe you catch your father at his most vulnerable moment, and if you're disrespectful, then you transgress against the spirit of the Father. And if you transgress against the spirit of the Father and lose respect for the spirit of the Father, then that is likely to transform you into a slave.

That's a very interesting idea. I think it's particularly germane to our current cultural situation. I think that we're constantly pushed to see the nakedness of our Father, so to speak, because of the intense criticism that's directed towards our culture—the patriarchal culture. We're constantly exposing its weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and, let's say, its nakedness. There's nothing wrong with criticism, but the purpose of criticism is to separate the wheat from the chaff: it's not to burn everything to the ground. It's to say, well, we're going to carefully look at this; we're going to carefully differentiate; we're going to keep what's good, and we're going to move away from what's bad.

The criticism isn't to identify everything that's bad: it's to separate what's good from what's bad, so that you can retain what's good and move towards it. To be careless of that is deadly. You're inhabited by the spirit of the Father, right? Insofar as you're a cultural construction, which, of course, is something that the postmodern neo-Marxists are absolutely emphatic about: you're a cultural construction. Insofar as you're a cultural construction, then you're inhabited by the spirit of the Father. To be disrespectful towards that means to undermine the very structure that makes up a good portion of what you are, insofar as you're a socialized, cultural entity. If you pull the foundation out from underneath that, what do you have left? You can hardly manage on your own. It's just not possible. You're a cultural creation.

Ham makes this desperate error, and is careless about exposing himself to the vulnerability of his father. Something like that. He does it without sufficient respect. The judgement is that, not only will he be a slave, but so will all of his descendants. He's contrasted with the other two sons, who, I suppose, are willing to give their father the benefit of the doubt. When they see him in a compromising position, they handle it with respect, and don't capitalize on it. Maybe that makes them strong. That's what it seems like to me. I think that's what that story means. It has something to do with respect. The funny thing about having respect for your culture—and I suppose that's partly why I'm doing the Biblical stories: they're part of my culture. They're part of our culture, perhaps. But they are certainly part of my culture. It seems to me that it's

worthwhile to treat that with respect, to see what you can glean from it, and not kick it when it's down, let's say.

And so that's how the story of Noah ends. The thing, too, is that Noah is actually a pretty decent incarnation of the spirit of the Father, which, I suppose, is one of the things that makes Ham's misstep more egregious. I mean, Noah just built an ark and got everybody through the flood, man. It's not so bad, and so maybe the fact that he happened to drink too much wine one day wasn't enough to justify humiliating him. I don't think it's pushing the limits of symbolic interpretation to note on a daily basis that we're all contained in an ark. You could think about that as the ark that's been bequeathed to us by our forefathers: that's the tremendous infrastructure that we inhabit, that we take for granted because it works so well. It protects us from things that we cannot even imagine, and we don't have to imagine them, because we're so well protected.

One of the things that's really struck me hard about the disintegration and corruption of the universities is the absolute ingratitude that goes along with that. Criticism, as I said, is a fine thing, if it's done in a proper spirit, and that's the spirit of separating the wheat from the chaff. But it needs to be accompanied by gratitude, and it does seem to me that anyone who lives in a Western culture at this time and place in history, and who isn't simultaneously grateful for that, is half blind, at least. It's never been better than this, and it could be so much worse—and it's highly likely that it will be so much worse, because, for most of human history, so much worse is the norm.

Then there's this little story that crops up, that seems, in some ways, unrelated to everything that's gone before it. But I think it's also an extremely profound little story. It took me a long time to figure it out. It's the Tower of Babel.

"And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there." That's Noah's descendants. "And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar." So they're establishing a city. "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. "And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down,

and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. "So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth."

It's a very difficult story to understand. On the face of it, it doesn't seem to show God in a very good light. Well, that happens fairly frequently in the Old Testament, as far as I can tell. But the thing to do—if you're reading in the spirit of the text, let's say—is to remember that it's God that you're talking about. Even though you might think that he's appearing in a bad light, your duty—as a reader, I suppose—is to assume that you're wrong, and what he did was right. And then you're supposed to figure out, well, how could it possibly be right? The axiomatic presupposition is that it's God, and that whatever he does is right. It's also the case that some of the people that God talks to in the Old Testament actually disagree with him, and convince him to alter his actions. But the point still remains: it's God, and if he's doing it, then, by definition, there's a good reason.

There's an idea, much later, that [John Milton](#) develops in [Paradise Lost](#). *Paradise Lost* is an amazing poem. It's a profound enough poem so that it's almost been incorporated into the Biblical structure, I would say. The corpus of Christianity, post-Milton, was saturated by the Miltonic stories of Satan's rebellion. None of that's in the Biblical text. It's only hinted at, in very brief passages. Milton wrote his poem to justify the ways of God to man, which is quite an ambition. It's an amazing, profound ambition, to try to produce a literary work that justifies being to human beings. That's what Milton was trying to do.

One of my viewers sent me a link the other day to a work of philosophy by an Australian philosopher, whose name I don't remember. He basically wrote a book saying that being as such—human experience—is so corrupt and permeated by suffering that it would be better if it had never existed, at all. It's sort of the ultimate expression of nihilism. The Mephistopheles in [Goethe's Faust](#)—who's a Satanic character, obviously—has that as a credo. That's Satan's fundamental motivation. His objection to creation itself is that creation is so flawed and so rife with suffering that it would be better if it had never existed, at all. That's his motivation for attempting to continue to destroy it.

In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Satan is an intellectual figure. You see that motif

emerge very frequently in popular culture. In the Lion King, for example, Scar is a Satanic figure, and also a hyper-intellectual. That's very common. It's the evil scientist motif, or the evil advisor to the king: the same motif. It encapsulates something about rationality. What it seems to encapsulate is the idea that rationality, like Satan, is the highest angel in God's heavenly kingdom. It's a psychological idea, that the most powerful subelement of the human psyche is the human intellect. It's this thing that shines out above all within the domain of humanity and, maybe, across the domain of life itself. The human intellect... There's something absolutely remarkable about it, but it has a flaw. The flaw is that it tends to fall in love with its own productions, and to assume that they're total. [Solzhenitsyn](#), when he was writing the [Gulag Archipelago](#), had a warning about that, with regards to totalitarian ideology. He said that the price of selling your God-given soul to the entrapments of human dogma was slavery and death, essentially.

In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Satan decides that he can do without the transcendent—he can do without God. That's why he fomented rebellion. It's something like that. The immediate consequence, from Milton's perspective, was that, as soon as Satan decided that what he knew was sufficient, and that he could do without the transcendent—which you might think about as the domain outside of what you know—immediately, he was in hell. I was studying totalitarianism when I read *Paradise Lost*. I thought the true poet, like a prophet, is someone who has intimations of the future. Maybe that's because the poetic mind—the philosophic or poetic mind—is a pattern detector. There are people who can detect the melody of a nation. Melody, as in song: the song of a nation. They can see how it's going to develop across the centuries. You see that in Nietzsche. Nietzsche, for example, around 1860, prophesied what was going to happen in the 20th century. He said, specifically, that the spectre of communism would kill millions of people in the 20th century. It's an amazing prophecy. He said that in the notes that became [The Will to Power](#).

[Dostoevsky](#) was of the same sort of mind—someone who was in touch enough with the fundamental patterns of human movement that they could extrapolate out into the future and see what was coming. Some people are very good at detecting patterns. Milton, I think, was of that sort. I think he had intimations of what was coming, as human rationality and technology became more and more powerful. The intimation was that we would produce systems that dispensed with God, that were completely rational, that were completely total, and that would immediately turn everything they touched into something

indistinguishable from hell. Milton's warning, embodied in the poem, is that the rational mind that generates a production and then worships it as if it's absolute, immediately occupies hell.

So what does that have to do with the Tower of Babel? Back in 2008, when we had that economic collapse, a strange political idea emerged, and that was the idea of too big to fail. I thought about that idea for a long time. I thought, there's something deeply wrong with that. One of the things that made Marx wrong was the belief that capital would flow into the hands of fewer and fewer people, and that the disassociation between the rich and the poor would become more extreme as capitalism developed. Like so many things that Marx said, it's kind of true.

It's kind of true in that the distribution of wealth—in fact, the distribution of anything that's produced—follows a [Pareto](#) pattern. The Pareto pattern is basically that a small proportion of people end up with the bulk of the goods. It isn't just money: anything that people produce creatively ends up in that distribution. The economists call that the [Matthew principle](#), and they take that from a statement in the New Testament. The statement is, "to those who have everything, more will be given; and to those who have nothing, everything will be taken." It's a map of the manner in which the world manifests itself, where human creative production is involved. The map seems to indicate that, as you start to produce, and you're successful, the probability that you'll continue to be successful or accelerate increases, as you're successful. And as you fail, the probability that you'll fail starts to accelerate. So your progress through life looks like a sharp curve up, or like a sharp curve down. Something like that.

The reason that Marx was right was because he noted that curve as a feature of the capitalist system. The reason that he was wrong was that it's not a feature that's specific to a capitalist system: it's a feature that's general to all systems of creative production that are known. It's like a natural law, and it's enough of a natural law, by the way, that the distribution of wealth can be modelled using the same equations that govern the distribution of gas molecules in a vacuum. It's a fundamentally profound observation about the way the world lays itself out. It's problematic because, if resources accrue unfairly to a small minority of people and there's a natural law-like element to that, that has to be dealt with from the social perspective, because if the inequality becomes too extreme, then the whole system will destabilize. So you can have an intelligent discussion about how to mitigate the effects of transfer of creative production into the hands of a small number of people.



small number of people.

However, having said that, the other reason that Marx was wrong—there's a number of them. One is that, even though creative products end up in the hands of a small number of people, it's not the same number of people consistently, across time. It's the same proportion of people, and that's not the same thing. Imagine that there's water going down a drain. You say, well, look at the spiral; it's permanent. Well, the spiral's permanent, but the water molecules aren't; they're moving through it. It's the same, in some sense, with the Pareto distribution. There's a one percent, and there's always a one percent, but it's not the same people. The stability of it differs from culture to culture, but there's a lot of movement in the upper one percent—a tremendous amount of movement.

One of the reasons for that movement is that things get large, and then they get too large, and then they collapse. So, in 2008, when the politicians said "too big to fail," they got something truly backwards, as far as I can tell. The statement was reversed: it should have been, "so big that it had to fail." That's what I think the story of the Tower of Babel is about: it's a warning against the expansion of a system until it encompasses everything. It's a warning against totalitarian presumptions. For example, when people set out to build the Tower of Babel, they want to build a structure that reaches to heaven. The idea is that it can replace the role of God. It's something like that. It can erase the distinction between earth and heaven. There's a utopian vision, there, as well: we can build a structure that's so large and encompassing that it can replace heaven itself. The fact that that doesn't work, and that God objects to it, is also extraordinarily interesting. It's an indication, to me, of the unbelievably profundity of these stories. I think one thing we should have learned from the 20th century—but, of course, didn't—was that there's something extraordinarily dangerous about totalitarian utopian visions.

That's something that Dostoevsky wrote about in his great book [Notes from Underground](#). Dostoevsky figured out by the early 1900s that there was something very, very pathological about a utopian vision of perfection—that it was profoundly antihuman. In *Notes from Underground*, he demolishes the notion of utopia. Dostoevsky says that, if you brought the socialist utopia into being, and human beings had nothing to do but eat, drink, and busy themselves with the continuation of the species, the first thing that would happen under circumstances like that would be that human beings would go mad and break the system, smash it, just so that something unexpected and crazy could happen.

Human beings don't want utopian comfort and certainty. Human beings want adventure, chaos, and uncertainty. And so the very notion of a utopia was antihuman, because we're not built for static utopia: we're built for a dynamic situation where there's demands placed on us, and where there's the optimal amount of uncertainty. We know what happened in the 20th century as a consequence of the widespread promulgation of utopian schemes. What happened was mayhem on a scale that had never been matched in the entire history of humanity. That's really saying something, because there was plenty of mayhem before the 20th century. I guess there wasn't as much industrial clout behind it. And so, early in the Biblical narrative, you have a warning against hubris, and some indication that properly functioning systems have an appropriate scale.

I read an article in *The Economist* magazine this week about the rise of nationalist movements all over the world, as a counterbalance to globalization—maybe it's most marked with the European economic community. The *Economist* writers were curious about why that countermovement has been developing. But it seems to me that it's also a Tower of Babel phenomena: to bring all of that multiplicity under the umbrella of a single unity is to simultaneously erect a system where the top is so far from the bottom that the bottom has no connection to the top. Your social systems have to be large enough so they protect you but small enough that you have a place in them. It seems to me, perhaps, that what's happened in places like the EEC is that the distance between the typical citizen and the bureaucracy that runs the entire structure has got so great that it's an element of destabilization, in and of itself. And so people revert back to, say, nationalistic identities. It's something that they can relate to. There's a history there, and a shared, genuine identity—an identity of language and tradition that's not an artificial, abstract imposition from the top.

In the Mesopotamian creation myth, mostly what you see menacing humanity is Tiamat. She's the dragon of chaos. That's mother nature, red in tooth and claw. But by the time the Egyptians come along, it isn't only nature that threatens humanity: it's the social structure itself. So the Egyptians had two deities that represented the social structure. One was [Osiris](#), who was like the spirit of the Father. He was a great hero who established Egypt, but became old, willfully blind, and senile. He had an evil brother named [Seth](#). Seth was always conspiring to overthrow him. And, because Osiris ignored him long enough, Seth did overthrow him—chopped him into pieces and distributed them all

around the kingdom. Osiris' son, Horus, had to come back and defeat Seth, to take the kingdom back. That's how that story ends. But the Egyptians seemed to have realized—maybe because they had become bureaucratized to quite a substantial degree—that it wasn't only nature that threatened humankind: it was also the proclivity of human organizations to become too large, too unwieldy, too deceitful, and too willfully blind, and, therefore, liable to collapse. Again, I see echoes of that in the story of the Tower of Babel. It's a calling for a kind of humility of social engineering.

One of the other things I've learned as a social scientist...I've been warned about this by, I would say, great social scientists...is that you want to be very careful about doing large-scale experimentation with large-scale systems, because the probability that, if you implement a scheme in a large-scale social system, that that scheme will have the result that you intended, is negligible. What will happen will be something that you don't intend—and, even worse, something that works at counter-purposes to your original intent. That makes sense. If you have a very, very complex system, and you perturb it, the probability that you can predict the consequences of the perturbation is extraordinarily low, obviously. If the system works, though, you think you understand it, because it works. You think it's simpler than it actually is, and so then you think that your model of it is correct, and then you think that your manipulation of the model, which produces the outcome you model, will be the outcome that's actually produced in the world. That doesn't work, at all.

I thought about that an awful lot, thinking about how to remediate social systems. Obviously, they need careful attention and adjustment. It struck me that the proper strategy for implementing social change is to stay within your domain of competence. That requires humility, which is a virtue that is never promoted in modern culture, I would say. It's a virtue that you can hardly even talk about. But humility means you're probably not as smart as you think you are, and you should be careful. So then the question might be, well, ok, you should be careful, but perhaps you still want to do good. You want to make some positive changes. How can you be careful and do good? Then I would say, well, you try not to step outside the boundaries of your competence. You start small, and you start with things that you actually could adjust, that you actually do understand, that you actually could fix.

I mentioned to you, at one point, that one of the things Carl Jung said was that modern men don't see God because they don't look low enough. It's a very interesting phrase. One of the things that I've been promoting online, I suppose

interesting phrase. One of the things that I've been promoting online, I suppose, is the idea that you should restrict your attempts to fix things to what's at hand. There's probably things about you that you could fix, right? Things that you know aren't right—not anyone else's opinion: your own opinion. Maybe there's some things that you could adjust in your family. That gets hard. You have to have your act together a lot before you can start to adjust your family, because things can kick back on you really hard. You think, well, it's hard to put yourself together. It's really hard to put your family together. Why the hell do you think you can put the world together? Because, obviously, the world is more complicated than you and your family. And so, if you're stymied in your attempts even to set your own house in order—which, of course, you are—then you would think that what that would do would be to make you very, very leery about announcing your broad-scale plans for social revolution.

It's a peculiar thing because that isn't how it works. People are much more likely to announce their plans for broad-scale social revolution than they are to try to set themselves straight or their families straight. I think the reason for that is that, as soon as they try to set themselves or their families straight, the system immediately kicks back at them—instantly. Whereas, if they announce their plans for large-scale social revolution, the lag between the announcement and the kickback is so long that they don't recognize that there's any error. You can get away with being wrong, if nothing falls on you for a while. It's also an incitement to hubris, because you announce your plans for large-scale social revolution, stand back, and you don't get hit by lightning, and you think, well, I might be right, even though you're seriously not right. I might be right! And then you think, well, how wonderful is that? Especially if you can do it without any real effort. Fundamentally, I believe that that's what universities teach students to do, now. I really believe that. I think it's absolutely appalling and horribly dangerous, because it's not that easy to fix things, especially if you're not committed to it. I think you know if you're committed, because what you try to do is straighten out your own life, first, and that's enough.

I think the New Testament states that it's more difficult to rule yourself than it is to rule the city. That's not a metaphor. All of you who made announcements to yourself every January about changing your diet and going to the gym know perfectly well how difficult it is to regulate your own impulses and to bring yourself under the control of some ethical and attentive structure of values. It's extraordinarily difficult. People don't do it. Instead, they wander off, and I think they create towers of Babel.

The story indicates that those things collapse under their own weight, and everyone goes their own direction. I think I see that happening with the LGBT community. One of the things I've noticed that's very interesting is that the community is, in some sense...It's not a community. That's a technical error. But it's composed of outsiders, let's say. What you notice across the decades is that the acronym list keeps growing. I think that's because there's an infinite number of ways to be an outsider. Once you open the door to the construction of a group that's characterized by failing to fit into a group, then you immediately create a category that's infinitely expandable. I don't know how long the acronym list is now—it depends on which acronym list you consult—but I've seen lists of 10 or more acronyms. One of the things that's happening is that the community is starting to fragment in its interior, because there is no unity. Once you put a sufficient plurality under the sheltering structure of a single umbrella, say, the disunity starts to appear within. I think that's also a manifestation of the same issue that this particular story is dealing with.

So that ends, I would say, the most archaic stories in the Bible. I think the flood story and the Tower of Babel story outline the two fundamental dangers that beset mankind. One is the probability that blindness and sin will produce a natural catastrophe, or entice one. That's one that modern people are very aware of, in principle, right? We're all hyper-concerned about environmental degradation catastrophe. That's the continual reactivation of an archetypal idea in our unconscious minds—that there's something about the way we're living that's unsustainable and will create a catastrophe. It's so interesting because people believe that firmly and deeply, but they don't see the relationship between that and the archetypal stories. It's the same story: overconsumption, greed, all of that, is producing an unstable state, and nature will rebel and take us down.

You hear that every day, in every newspaper, in every TV station. It's broadcast to you constantly. That idea is presented in Genesis, in the story of Noah. So one warning that exists in the stories is to beware of natural catastrophe that's produced as a consequence of blindness and greed, let's say. The other is, beware of social structures that overreach, because they'll also produce fragmentation and disintegration. It's quite remarkable, I think, that, at the close of the story of the Tower of Babel, we've got both of the permanent, existential dangers that present themselves to humanity already identified.

At the end of the story of Adam and Eve, there's a fall into history. In one way, history begins with the fall. But there's a second fall. I think with the flood and

history begins with the fall. But there's a second fall, I think, with the flood and the Tower of Babel. History, in an even more real sense, begins with the story of Abraham: we're no longer precisely in the realm of the purely mythical. That would be another way of thinking about it. We have an identifiable person, who's part of an identifiable tribe, who's doing identifiable things. We're in the realm of history. And so history begins twice in the Old Testament. I suppose it begins again, after Moses, as well. But we've moved out of the domain of the purely mythical and into the realm of history, with the emergence of the stories about Abraham.

The first thing that I want to talk about in relationship to the Abrahamic stories is this idea of the experience of God. Abraham, although quite identifiable as an actual individual, is also characterized by this peculiarity. The peculiarity is that God manifests himself to Abraham, both as a voice and a presence. The stories never describe exactly how God manifests himself, except now and then he comes in the form of an angel. That's fairly concrete. But it's a funny thing that the author—or authors—of the Abrahamic stories seems to take the idea that God would make an appearance more or less for granted. I think part of the reason that I've struggled so much with the Abrahamic stories is because it's so hard to get a handle on that, and to understand what that might mean. And so I'm going to hit it from a bunch of different perspectives, and we'll see if we can come up with some understanding of it.

The first thing I'll do is tell you a story about a female neurologist, whose name escapes me at the moment. She wrote a book called [My Stroke of Insight](#). [Jill Bolte](#), I think is her name. She had medical training from Harvard in neuropsychological function, and she knew a lot about hemispheric specialization. We talked a little bit about hemispheric specialization, before. One of the ways of conceptualizing the difference between the two hemispheres is that the left hemisphere operates in known territory and the right hemisphere operates in unknown territory. That's one way of thinking about it. Or the left hemisphere operates in the orderly domain and the right hemisphere operates in the chaotic domain. Or the left hemisphere operates in the domain of detail and the right hemisphere operates in the domain of the large picture. It's something like that. People differ in their neurological wiring, so those are overgeneralizations. But that's ok; we'll live with that, for the time being.

It's certainly not an overgeneralization to point out that you do, in fact, have two hemispheres, and that their structures differ, and, if the connections between them are cut—which could happen, for example, if you had surgery for

intractable epilepsy—that each hemisphere would be capable of housing its own consciousness. That’s been [well documented](#) by neurologists named Gazzaniga and Sperry, who did split brain experiments—must be 30 years ago, now. Now we know that the left and right hemispheres are specialized for different functions. The right hemisphere, for example, seems to be more involved in the generation of negative emotion. The left hemisphere seems to be more involved in the generation of positive emotion and approach. So the right hemisphere stops you, and the left hemisphere moves you forward.

Anyways, Jill Bolte...I hope I’ve got that right...had a stroke and maintained consciousness during the stroke. She analyzed it while it was happening. While it was happening, she was able to hypothesize about what part of her brain was being destroyed. So she had a congenital blood vessel malformation and had an aneurysm. It just about killed her. But she said that it effected her left hemisphere. She said that she experienced a sense of divine unity as a consequence of the stroke, because the left hemisphere function was disrupted and destroyed. She became right hemisphere dominant. Her experience with that was the dissolution of the specific ego into absolute consciousness. It was something like that. That’s only a case study. You don’t want to make too much of case studies, but there is an overwhelming amount of evidence that those two kinds of consciousness exist, one being your consciousness, of you as a localized and specified being, and the other being this capacity to experience oceanic dissolution and the sense of the cosmos being one.

Now why we have those capacities for different conscious experiences is very difficult to understand. Part of me thinks that we have a generic human brain—the brain of the species. Allied with that, we have a specific, individual brain. One is the left hemisphere, and one is the right hemisphere. The left hemisphere is the specific, individual brain, and usually it’s on and working, because, obviously, you have to take care of yourself as a specific entity, and not as a generalized, cosmic phenomena. It’s hard to dice celery when you’re a generalized, cosmic phenomena, right? You have to be more pointed than that. But let’s make no mistake about it: the fact that those different states of consciousness exist is not disputable. They can be elicited in all sorts of ways.

I’m going to read you something that [Aldous Huxley](#) wrote about this back in, I think, 1956. This was after he started his experimentation with [mescaline](#). The psychedelics were introduced into Western culture in the 1950s, in a whole bunch of different ways. LSD was discovered right after the end of World War

II. It was discovered by accident, actually. Leaving Sandoz Labs, the guy who discovered it, [Albert Hoffman](#), had spilled some on his hands. You can absorb it through your skin. He was biking home when he had the world's first LSD trip, which was somewhat of a shock to him—and then to the entire world.

Huxley, who was a great literary figure and a real genius, experimented with mescaline in the late 50s. He wrote a book called [The Doors of Perception](#), which had a huge impact on the emerging psychedelic culture on the East Coast, at Harvard, and on the West Coast, with [Ken Kesey](#) and his merry pranksters—the people who popularized LSD. That's all documented in the book [The Electric Kool-Aide Acid Test](#), which I would highly recommend. On the East Coast, it was [Timothy Leary](#). I had Timothy Leary's old job at Harvard. That was kind of cool, in a warped way. I met people there who knew him, and who didn't think much of him, also.

Huxley had a mescaline experience that transported him to an alternative consciousness. He said that, during his mescaline experience, the entire world glowed from within, like there was an inner light—a paradisaal inner light—and that everything was deeply meaningful, symbolically suggestive, overwhelming, beautiful, and timeless. He had an experience of divine eternity. I suppose that's the most straightforward way to put that. And we know perfectly well that the psychedelic drugs interact with the brain chemical called serotonin, which is a very, very fundamental neurotransmitter. They all have approximately the same range of effect, although there's a very large multitude of effects that sort of exist underneath that umbrella.

Huxley was staggered by his mescaline experience. He didn't really know what to make of it. I think that's the common experience of people who have exceptionally profound psychedelic experiences. I'll tell you some documentation about that in a moment. But he spent quite a long time trying to come to grips with what this might mean from an intellectual perspective. Huxley had a great brain. If someone was going to wrestle with a problem like that, he was a good candidate. He must have had a verbal IQ of 180. His books are incredibly literate. He had an incredible mastery of language, complexity of characterization, and intellectual discourse—really remarkable.

So this is what Huxley had to say after his mescaline experience. He talked about heaven and hell, and he talked about that in reference to bad trips, essentially. It was known by that point that a psychedelic experience could transport you to an ecstatic domain of divine revelation but could take you to



transport you to an ecstatic domain of divine revelation, but could take you to the worst imaginable place, as well. Huxley was very interested in why you would even have the capacity for experiences like that, which I think is a very good question. It's a completely unanswered question. We don't know much about consciousness, and we know even less about psychedelics, I would say. They are an absolute mystery. I don't think we understand them in the least. Huxley did a good job of starting to at least map out the mysteries of the terrain.

He said, "like earth of a hundred years ago, our mind still has its darkest Africas, its unmapped Borneos and Amazonian basins. In relation to the fauna of these regions we are not yet zoologists, we are mere naturalists and collectors of specimens. The fact is unfortunate; but we have to accept it, we have to make the best of it. "However lowly, the work of the collector must be done, before we can proceed to the higher scientific tasks of classification, analysis, experiment, and theory making. Like the giraffe and the duck-billed platypus, the creatures inhabiting these remoter regions of the mind are exceedingly improbable. Nevertheless they exist, they are facts of observation; and as such, they cannot be ignored by anyone who is honestly trying to understand the world in which he lives."

When psychiatrists started to study LSD—that was mostly in the late 50s and running forward from that—they thought about the drug as a psychotomimetic, which was a chemical substance that would induce psychosis. But that turned out to not be true, not with the psychedelics. Schizophrenics were given LSD, and the schizophrenics reported that, while the experience was certainly extraordinarily strange, it wasn't like being schizophrenic. And then it was found, later, that if you gave schizophrenics amphetamines, that made them worse. In fact, you can induce a paranoid psychosis in a normal person by overdosing them with amphetamines. So whatever the hallucinogens or psychedelics are doing, it's not the same thing as mania, and it's not the same thing as schizophrenia. Not at all. So you can't just write the experience off as an induced psychosis.

Whatever it is, independent of its utility or lack thereof, it's not induced psychosis. It can be induced by drugs and deprivation. There are accounts throughout history of people putting themselves in extreme physiological situations in order to induce transformations of consciousness. Fasting is one of the routes to doing that. Dancing is another route. Prolonged periods of isolation will also do it. You could say that exposing yourself to any of those in excess produces a state that's indistinguishable from illness, and that there's no reason

to assume that the phenomena that are associated with illness have any utility, whatsoever. Although, it's interesting to me that a disrupted consciousness can produce coherent experiences. It's not exactly what you'd expect, if it was just an illness. If you developed, say, a high fever, your experience isn't transcendent and coherent. It's fragmented and pathologized. The difference, I think, is quite distinct. We don't have to only speculate about that, because there's been enough experimental work done, now, with hallucinogens and psychedelics, to indicate that the notion that what they produce is something that's only akin to pathology is wrong.

It's not a matter of opinion, at this point in the sequence of scientific and historical investigation. In fact, there was a large-scale study done five or 10 years ago of 200,000 people who had experimented with psychedelics. They were mentally and physically healthier than people who hadn't on virtually every parameter they examined. In fact, the rate of flashbacks—you've heard of LSD flashbacks? It's mostly a hypothetical phenomena. But the rate of self-reported flashbacks was higher among the non-psychedelic users than among the psychedelic users. That was very interesting. It was a huge study. You could say that those who had experimented with psychedelics were prone to be healthier to begin with, but that still contradicts the pathology argument, so it doesn't matter. Either way, the pathology argument is contradicted.

Oh, I did put that in. It was Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor. This is what she said about her stroke: "I remember that first day of the stroke with terrific bitter-sweetness. In the absence of the normal functioning of my left orientation association area, my perception of my physical boundaries was no longer limited to where my skin met air. I felt like a genie liberated from its bottle. The energy of my spirit seemed to flow like a great whale gliding through a sea of silent euphoria. This absence of physical boundary was one of glorious bliss."

Recently, [Dr. Roland Griffith](#)—I met him, once, at a conference in San Francisco. Surprise, surprise. It was a conference on awe, and this was just when he was embarking on his experiments with psilocybin, which were the first experiments on hallucinogens that were permitted by the national institute of mental health in some three or four decades. He had to be careful to lay out the scientific protocols so that the ethics committees would approve the experiments, and so that the federal funding agencies would also allow the experiments to go through. He started to experiment with psilocybin. He's found and published a number of very interesting results. One was that a single

psilocybin trip—and I specify trip because, sometimes, when people take psilocybin at the doses that Griffith uses, they don't have a psychedelic experience. Most people who take the dose do, but not everyone. Those who take the dose and don't have the mystical experience, don't experience the consequences of taking the drug. The consequences can be quite profound. One consequence is that, if you have the mystical experience that's associated with psilocybin ingestion, you're liable to represent that to others and yourself as one of the two or three most important experiences of your entire life. So that would be at the same level as the birth of your child or your marriage, let's say—assuming that those were transcendent experiences. But that's how people describe them. That's very interesting in and of itself.

Another thing that Griffith reported was that, one year after a single psilocybin dose profound enough to induce a mystical experience, the trait openness of the participants had increased one standard deviation, which is a tremendous amount. And so it looked like one dose produced a permanent neurological and psychological transformation. Now I'm not saying that that's a good thing. I'm not saying that, because I don't think that openness is an untroubled blessing. But it's certainly a testament to the unbelievable potency of the drug. There's about a ten percent chance, by the way, with psilocybin ingestion, of a trip to hell. That's certainly something very much worth considering when you're thinking about the potential effects of this kind of experience.

So the mystical experience produced by psilocybin is rated by people as among the most profound experiences of their life, and as life changing. It produces permanent personality transformations: 85 percent success in smoking cessation with a single dose. That's another thing that Griffith demonstrated. Now that is mind-boggling. There are chemical treatments for smoking cessation. Bupropion is one. It reduces craving, to some degree, but its success rate is nowhere near 85 percent, certainly not with a single dose. And so we don't understand how it can be that that occurs, but it's nice and documented by Griffith's team.

In this experiment, he gave psilocybin to people who were dying of cancer. "Cancer patients often develop chronic, clinically significant symptoms of depression and anxiety. Previous studies suggest that psilocybin may decrease depression and anxiety in cancer patients." Aldous Huxley took LSD on his deathbed, by the way. So the idea that there was something about psychedelic substances that could buffer people against the catastrophes of mortality is as old as experimentation with the drug itself. "The effects of psilocybin were studied in 51 cancer patients with life-threatening diagnoses and symptoms of

in 51 cancer patients with life-threatening diagnoses and symptoms of depression and/or anxiety"—unsurprisingly.

I don't really know if it's reasonable to describe the emotional state of people diagnosed with cancer of uncertain prognosis or mortal significance as depression, precisely. If you go to the doctor and he tells you that you have intractable, fatal cancer, the normative response is to be rather upset and anxious about that. One of the things that bothers me about clinical psychiatry and clinical psychology is the automatic presupposition that even overwhelming states of negative emotions are properly categorized as depression. I don't think you're depressed when you get a cancer diagnosis. I don't think that's the right way to think about it. I think that you have a big problem, and it's not surprising that you're overwhelmed by negative emotion. To think about that as psychiatric malfunction is a major error. Anyways, it's a side issue with regards to this study.

"The effects of psilocybin were studied in 51 cancer patients with life-threatening diagnoses and symptoms of depression and/or anxiety." I cannot imagine how they got this through an ethics committee. It's like, we're gonna take people who have uncertain diagnosis of cancer that are potentially life-threatening, and we're going to give them psychedelics. But they did it, and I think it's a testament to Griffith's stature as a researcher that that was allowable.

"This randomized, double-blind, cross-over trial"—a very carefully designed clinical investigation. People were assigned to the treatment group, or to the drug group, or to the non-drug group, randomly, blindly. They also investigated the effects of the drug at different doses, which is another hallmark of a well-designed pharmacological study. "...a very low (placebo-like) dose (one or three mg/70 kg) vs. a high dose (22 or 30 mg/70 kg) of psilocybin administered in counterbalanced sequence with five weeks between sessions and a six-month follow-up."

"Instructions to participants and staff minimized expectancy effects. Participants, staff, and community observers rated participant moods, attitudes, and behaviours throughout the study." That's also a hallmark of a well-designed study, because it didn't rely on a single source of information for the outcome data. They got self-reports—that's fine—but they had relatively objective observers also gathering data, at the same time.

"High-dose psilocybin produced large decreases in clinician and self-rated

measures of depressed mood and anxiety, along with increases in quality of life, life meaning, and optimism, and decreases in death anxiety." That's a subtle and scientifically sparse statement, but it's a very interesting one. There's an intimation of a causal relationship, here: "increases in quality of life, life meaning, and optimism, and decreases in death anxiety." The intimation is that one of the ways of decreasing your anxiety about death is to increase the felt meaning in your life. The psilocybin doses potentiate that, but it's a good thing to know in a general manner, if it happens to be a generalizable truth. If you're terrified of mortality, terrified of vulnerability, there's always the possibility that the life path that you're following isn't rich enough to buffer you against the negative element of existence. It's a reasonable hypothesis—and an optimistic one, I think, although also a difficult one.

"At six-month follow-up, these changes were sustained, with about 80 percent of participants continuing to show clinically significant decreases in depressed mood and anxiety."

Stephen Ross, a co-investigator, commented that "it is simply unprecedented in psychiatry that a single dose of a medicine produces these kinds of dramatic and enduring results." Right—which means that we have no idea why this happens. "Participants attributed improvements in attitudes about life/self, mood, relationships, and spirituality to the high-dose experience, with more than 80 percent endorsing moderately or greater increased well-being/life satisfaction. Community observer ratings showed corresponding changes. Mystical-type psilocybin experience on session day mediated the effect of psilocybin dose on therapeutic outcomes." What that means is that, when researchers were trying to look at a causal relationship between drug ingestion and the positive outcome, the causal relationship was drug ingestion, then mystical experience, then positive outcome. It wasn't drug ingestion, then positive outcome: there had to be the experience produced by that pharmaceutical agent in order for the pharmaceutical agent to have had its effect.

Again, we don't know why that is, either. Maybe some people need a higher dose. People vary tremendously in their sensitivity to pharmaceutical substances. Now why am I telling you all this? Well, I'm telling you for a variety of reasons. The first is, make no mistake about it: human beings have the capacity for forms of consciousness that are radically unlike our normative forms of consciousness. The evidence that those alternative forms of consciousness are purely pathological—which is the simplest explanation, right? You perturb a system, it produces pathology. That's negative. That is the

simplest explanation. The evidence for that is weak, at best—leaving out the bad trip issue, which is nontrivial. The empirical evidence, as it accrues, seems to suggest, in fact, that the consequence of positive mystical experience, as associated with psychedelic intake, is overwhelmingly positive, even in extreme situations.

You really can't find a more extreme situation than uncertain cancer diagnosis with [concomitant](#) depression and anxiety. That's not as bad as it gets, but it's kinda in the ballpark. And so the fact is that, even under circumstances like that, there was the overwhelming probability that the experience would be positive. That's another thing that you wouldn't expect, even from some of the earliest discussions about psychedelic use, that were put forth by people including Timothy Leary, describing the importance of set. The early experimenters noted that, if you had a psychedelic experience and you were in a bad state, or in a bad place, that that was one of the precursors to a bad trip—that the negative emotion that you entered the experience with could be magnified tremendously by the chemical substance. So it was necessary to be somewhere safe, to be around people that you trust, to be in a familiar environment, to get all the variables that you could control, under control. But here's a situation where that isn't what's happening, at all. People have this cancer diagnosis of unspecified outcome, and the vast majority of them had a positive experience, and the positive experience had long-lasting, positive consequences. So the case that the transcendent experience is not real, is wrong. It's real. We don't know what that means, because it actually challenges, to some degree, our concepts of what constitutes real. But it's certainly well within the realm of normative human experience, so it's part of the human capacity.

There's been other neurological experiments, too. There's a Canadian researcher who, if I remember correctly, invented something he called the [God Helmet](#). It used electromagnetic brain stimulation to induce mystical experiences. Now I don't remember what part of the brain he was shutting off or activating with that particular gadget. All sorts of other indications of this sort of thing have cropped up in other domains of the neurological literature. For example, it's very common for people who are epileptic to have religious experiences as part of the prodroma to the actual seizure. That was the case with Dostoevsky, who had incredibly intense religious experiences that would culminate in an epileptic seizure. He said that they were of sufficient quality that he would give up his whole life to have had them. The funny thing, too, is that—in my reading of Dostoevsky, at least—I think that the epileptic seizures, and the associated

mystical experiences, were part of what made him a transcendently brilliant author. I don't think that he would have broken through into the domains of insight that he possessed without those strange, neurological experiences. It was certainly not the case that his epilepsy, or the experiences that were associated with it, produced what you might describe as an impairment with his cognitive functions. Quite the contrary. At least, that's how it looks to me.

Here's something else worth considering. I don't know how important it is, but it might be really important. This is something that Carl Jung said, so it depends on how important Jung is. Freud established the field of psychoanalysis, and with it, rigorous investigation into the contents of the unconscious. Modern psychologists and psychiatrists like to...what would you say...denigrate Freud. I think there's a reason for that: I think that Freud's fundamental insights were so profound and so valuable that they got immediately absorbed into our culture, and now they seem self-evident. All that's left of Freud is his errors. We believe everything else. We believe all the profound things he discovered. We just take them for granted, and so we don't believe the things that he said that weren't quite on the money. That's all we credit him with, now. But he was certainly the first person who brought up the idea of the unconscious in a rigorous manner. He was the first person to do a rigorous examination of dreams. [The Interpretation of Dreams](#) is a great book. It's well-worth reading. And Freud was the first person to note that people were, in some sense, inhabited by subpersonalities that had a certain degree of autonomy and independent life—brilliant observation. The cognitive psychologists haven't caught up with that at all, yet.

Jung was profoundly affected by Nietzsche and Freud. Those were his two main intellectual influences—I don't think one more than the other. He split with Freud on the religious issue. That was what caused the disruption in their relationship. I think it's an extremely interesting historical occurrence. It might be of profound significance.

Freud believed that the fundamental myth of the human being was the Oedipal myth. The Oedipal myth, from a broader perspective, is a failed hero story. The Oedipal myth is the myth of a man who grows up, but then, accidentally, becomes too close to his mother, sleeps with her, not knowing who she is, and, as a consequence, blinds himself. There's a warning in that story about human development gone wrong. I think that Freud put his finger on it extraordinarily well. Human beings have a very long period of dependency, and one of the things that you do see in clinical practice is that many of people's problems are associated with their inability to break free of their family. They're consumed by

associated with their inability to break free of their family. They're consumed by the family drama. They can't get beyond what happened to them in their family. They're stuck in the past. That's equivalent—symbolically speaking, you might say—to the idea of being too close to your mother—of the boundaries being improperly specified. That happens far more often than anyone would like to think. As I said, Freud thought that it was a universal.

Jung had a different idea. His idea was that it wasn't the failed hero story that was the universal human myth: it was the successful hero story. That's a big difference. It's seriously a big difference. The successful hero story is—remember in *Sleeping Beauty*... You may remember this, in the Disney movie... The evil queen traps the prince in a dungeon. She's not going to let him out until he's old. There's this comical scene where she's down in the dungeon, he's all in chains, and she's laughing at him, telling him what his future's going to be like. She's quite evil. She paints this wonderful picture of him being freed in like 80 years and hobbling out of the castle, getting on his horse that's so old it can barely stand up, and him with grey hair. She recites the story of his eventual, triumphant departure from the castle as an old and decrepit man. She has a great laugh about it. It's nice. It's a real punchy story. It's really something wonderful for children, that story.

The prince gets free of the shackles, and the things that free him are three little female fairies. It's the positive aspect of the feminine that frees him from the dungeon. It's very interesting and accurate from a psychological perspective. It's the negative element of the feminine that encapsulated him in the dungeon, and it's the positive element of the feminine that frees him. The evil queen is not very happy, when he escapes. You may remember that she stands on top of her castle tower and starts to spin off cosmic sparks. She's quite the creature, enveloped in flame, and then she turns into a dragon. And then the prince has to fight with her, in order to make contact with sleeping beauty and awaken her from her unconscious existence. It's a brilliant representation of the successful hero myth. He doesn't end up staying in an unholy relationship with his mother, let's say. He escapes, and then conquers the worst thing that can be imagined, and is ennobled by that. As a consequence, he's able to wake the slumbering feminine from its coma. That's a Jungian story, and that's the story that he juxtaposed against Freud.

Freud thought of religious phenomena as part of an occult tide that would drown rationality. That's why Freud was so vehemently anti-religious. Jung thought, no, that's not the case. There's something profound and central to the hero myth.



Jungian clinical work is, essentially, the awakening of the hero myth in the analysand—in the client, in the patient—to conceptualize yourself as that which can confront chaos, and triumph. That's associated with the ennobling of consciousness and the establishment of proper positive relationships between male and female. I'm a skeptical person. I'm a very, very skeptical person. I've tried, with every trick I have, to put a lever underneath Jung's story, lift it up, and disrupt it. I can't do it. I think he was right, and that Freud was wrong—I mean, I have great respect for Freud. I think he got the problem diagnosed very, very nicely.

In my clinical work, I see the phenomena that Freud described emerge continually, constantly. If you're interested in that, there's a documentary you should watch. I may have mentioned it before. I think it's the best documentary ever made. It's certainly the best one I've ever seen. It's called [Crumb](#). It's about an underground cartoonist, Robert Crumb, who was part of the hippy movement—although he hated hippies—in the 60s, in San Francisco, and started the entire underground comic culture that manifested itself, eventually, in graphic novels. He was quite a significant figure, from the perspective of popular art, and a very, very intelligent man. He was also, I would say, a hero, although a very bent, depraved, and warped one—someone very acutely aware of his own shadow. The documentary outlines his attempts to escape from his absolutely dreadful mother, and the failure of his two brothers to do the same thing, one of whom ended up as a street beggar in San Francisco, the other who drank furniture polish and died six months after the documentary was produced. It's an unbelievably shocking documentary. It's the only piece of film that I've ever seen that captures Freudian pathology.

You can't see Freudian pathology, generally, unless you're in a clinical situation, unless you know the person—intimate details of someone's life. You cannot communicate it. But the documentarist who made the film, Terry Zwigoff, was a friend of the Crumbs. He got access in a way that no one else would've. They were also very forthright and forthcoming about their situation, in general. I would highly recommend that. It's a real punch. If you want to know how a rapist thinks—if you actually want to know, because maybe you don't want to know. In fact, you probably don't want to know, right? Because do you really want to know that? To understand that means to put yourself in that position, and to understand it. If you really want to know how a serial sexual predator thinks, and why...If you watch Crumb, and you pay attention, you'll know. And that's only a tiny bit of what the film has to offer. It's really quite remarkable.

Anyways, Jung split with Freud on the issue of the Oedipal story as the fundamental myth of humankind, and on the issue of the validity of the religious viewpoint. Jung came down heavily on the side of the religious viewpoint. He established that in a book called [Symbols of Transformation](#), which was written in 1914. That's the book that produced the permanent split with Freud. I would say that book's actually been written four times: it was written as Symbols of Transformation, which Jung extensively revised when he was old, and then it was rewritten, in a sense, by a student of Jung's, [Eric Neumann](#), who's also someone that I would really recommend. Eric Neumann, I think, is Jung's greatest student. He wrote two books. He wrote one called [The Origins and History of Consciousness](#), which is a description of the development of consciousness out of unconsciousness, using the hero myth as an interpretive skeleton.

Neumann viewed the hero myth as the dramatized story of the emergence of human consciousness out of the surrounding unconscious out of which it was embedded—the struggle of consciousness upward, towards the light, like a lotus flower struggles up through the muck and the water to lay itself on the surface of the water, bloom, and reveal the Buddha, which is, of course, what the lotus flower does, from the symbolic perspective. For Neumann, the hero story was the story of the successful development of consciousness. The Origins and History of Consciousness is a great book. Interestingly, [Camille Paglia](#) read The Origins and History of Consciousness. She's one of the few mainstream intellectuals that I've ever encountered who read that and commented on it. She believed that it would be a sufficient antidote to postmodern denigration of literature. She thought it was that powerful of a work. I believe that. I think it's a remarkable book.

Carl Jung wrote the foreword to The Origins and History of Consciousness. He said, in the foreword, that it was the book that he wished he would have written. It's sort of like Jung wrote—I don't remember how many volumes...Dozens of very thick, difficult volumes. It's like Neumann was able to distill those into a single volume statement. I would also say, if you're interested in Jung, the best book to read is The Origins and History of Consciousness. It's the best intro into the Jungian world, because Jung's very difficult to understand. It requires a real shift of perspective in order to understand what he's talking about.

Neumann wrote another book called [The Great Mother](#), which is a little bit more specialized, in some sense, but it's also extremely interesting. It fleshes out the

archetype of chaos and its representation as feminine. It's a brilliant book, as well—highly worth reading, both those books.

Jung was a very strange person and a visionary. That's kept him outside of the academic realm, almost entirely. I was constantly warned, as an undergraduate, and then as a graduate student, and then as a professor, against ever talking about Jung, in any way whatsoever. When I went on the job market, when I'd graduated from McGill, I'd done my scientific research on alcoholism, and I'd had a fairly lengthy publication record that was pure empirical research, and really neurophysiological research into the pharmacology of alcohol. I'd established a reasonably solid dossier of publications. But, at the same time, I was writing this book that became [Maps of Meaning](#). I split my time in graduate school between these two endeavours, one very specifically neurological, pharmacological, and biologically based, and the other very abstract, religious, symbolic, psychoanalytic—the complete opposite. But I can see that the two things overlapped really nicely.

There was a number of scientists, at the time, that were also drawing the same conclusions—the same relationship between the biology and the psychoanalysis. [Jaak Panksepp](#), who wrote a book called [Affective Neuroscience](#)—which is a great classic—is one of those people who saw the relationship between the neurobiology of emotion and motivation, and the psychoanalytic insights. It never became a mainstream view, but I think it's too complex. I think that bridging the gap between the biology and the symbolic is too much for people, generally speaking. It was certainly, virtually too much for me. I got quite ill when I was a graduate student, for a variety of reasons. I also would go out and party three nights a week, and so that probably had something to do with it. But working on those two things simultaneously was also rather exhausting.

Jung was a tremendously insightful clinician. He was a strange person, an introverted visionary, high in introversion, very, very, very, very, very high in openness—like off the charts—and, also, God only knows what his IQ was. I mean, every time I read Jung—it's like reading Nietzsche—it's terrifying. He's so damn smart that he can think up answers to questions that you don't even—it's not like you don't understand the answers: it's that you never conceptualized the damn questions. It's really something to read someone like that, who says, here's a mystery. You go, wow! I never thought of that as a mystery. And then he says, here's the solution! It's like, ok... That's something. He read a very large variety of ancient languages, and he was very familiar with the entire

corpus of astrological thought, alchemical thought, classic literature, Biblical stories...I mean, educated in a way that no one is educated now. So he's a very daunting person to encounter, and terrifying. Absolutely terrifying. His book [Aion](#), which is the second part of volume nine...That damn book is just absolutely terrifying. Jung is one of these visionaries who can see way underneath the social structures and look at patterns that are developing—in Jung's case, across thousands of years—and lay them out. That's really something to encounter. Aion is a terrifying book.

Anyways, one question might be—because I read Jung, and I think, how the hell did he know these things? How could he figure these things out? I can't understand how he could possibly know these things. Well, here's a partial answer: Jung was a visionary. What that means, as far as I can tell...We could do a little, quick survey, here. How many of you think you think in words? What about pictures? How many of you think in pictures? So that's about half and half, by the way—probably a few more on the words side. How many of you think in pictures and words? Ok, it was roughly a third in each category. But it's also something that I really haven't encountered any research on, from the neuropsychological perspective. It's like, well, do you think in pictures, or do you think in words? And is that a reliable distinction? I think that I think in words, most of the time. But I can think in pictures—if I'm trying to build something, I can think in pictures almost instantaneously, but it isn't my natural mode of thinking. I'm hyper-verbal, so my natural mode of thinking is to think everything through in words. But I know my wife isn't like that. She thinks in images, and then has to translate them into words.

Jung was very literate, and he could really think in words. But he could really think in images, also. Talking to my wife quite extensively, the intensity of her visualization vastly exceeds mine. So, for example, if I close my eyes and I try to imagine the crowd in front of me, it's pretty low resolution, vague, and not brilliantly colored and vivid. It's like I'm seeing through a glass darkly, let's say. I can't bring images to mind with spectacular clarity, but my wife is very good at that. Jung seemed to be an absolute genius at that kind of thing. He had a lot of visionaries in his family history, as well. I don't know to what degree there's a hereditary component to that. I don't know to what degree that's actually a neurological specialization. I presume it would be associated with trait openness, and that it differentiates itself into interest in ideas and aesthetics. My suspicion is that the people who are more interested in aesthetics are the visionary types: the ones who think in images.

Anyways, Jung could really think in images, and he could imagine beings. I had a client, once, who was a lucid dreamer. How many of you have had a lucid dream? Ok, many. That phenomena wasn't really even identified as a phenomena until the end of the 19th century. There was a book written about it that Freud tried to get his hands on but couldn't because it was a very rare book. There was a researcher about 30 years ago who started to study lucid dreams. But, anyways, I had a client who was a lucid dreamer. One of the things she could do was ask her dream characters what information they were trying to convey, and they would tell her. So that was very interesting. One of the consequences of that was...I don't have this story completely right in my memory, but it's close enough. She was afraid of a very large number of things. In her dream, a gypsy standing by a wagon told her that, if she was going to be successful in university, she would have to visit a slaughterhouse. That was something that was way beyond her capacity to tolerate. She was a vegetarian. She couldn't stand the sight of raw meat, even. She was very oppressed, depressed, and anxious because of the slaughterhouse nature of existence.

The slaughterhouse was out of the question as a clinical intervention. I asked her, what might be equivalent to that? She suggested an embalming, so I took her to an embalming. Exposure therapy is a hallmark of clinical psychology. One of the things you do with people, as a clinician, is you find out what they're afraid of, and you gradually and voluntarily expose them to that. That cures them. That's associated with the hero myth, right? It's exactly the same thing. There's a dragon; it's stopping you—because there's lots of dragons, and most aren't stopping you. You can ignore them. You don't have to slash away randomly. You're not supposed to be fighting dragons that aren't in your way, but if they are in your way, you can't ignore them, and then you decompose them into subdragons, and you have people take them on. As they take them on, they dispense with the dragon, and they gain the power of the dragon. It's like a video game—actually, a video game is like that experience. That's why people like the video games. Well, that's right, right? There's a reason that you absorb power when you overcome things in a video game. It's not like that's intrinsic to the video game structure. That's an archetypal idea. Anyways, we went and saw an embalming, which is a very interesting experience. It was quite useful for her. She knew what she could tolerate, after that, and it was a hell of a lot more than she thought she could tolerate. So that's very useful to know.

Back to Jung. He's a visionary thinker. Now, my client could lucid dream; she could ask her dream characters what they wanted, and what they were trying to

communicate to her. That was pretty interesting. That happened spontaneously; it had nothing to do with me. I'm interested in dreams, and many of my clients are great dreamers, especially the creative ones. I think it's a hallmark of creativity to have vivid dreams, and to be able to remember them. But that was a faculty that was natural to her.

I had this other client, at one point, and she had a variety of fears. She told me about a dream she had: She was walking down a beach, and on the side of the beach, up a small dune, there was this old man with a big python. There was a crowd around him. She was walking by the snake handler, the snake, and the crowd, and she didn't want to have anything to do with him. He was sort of showing people the snake. She told me that dream, and I thought, well, you probably need to go see that snake. I relaxed her with a quasi-hypnotic technique—it's very straightforward. Hypnosis is, generally, nothing but pronounced relaxation, although you have to be susceptible to hypnosis to fall into a hypnotic trance, as a consequence of being relaxed. I just relaxed her. I had her breathe deeply, pay attention to different parts of her body, and relax her muscles one by one, so that she could concentrate. And then I told her we'd play with the dream a little bit. It's a Jungian technique. I said, call the dream image to mind, which she could do quite well. I said, ok, so let's explore it. It's like pretend play.

If you're a kid, and you're pretend playing, you don't exactly direct the game, right? You play the game. So it's partly your direction—obviously, because you're the player—but the thing also happens spontaneously, of its own accord. You could think about that as a dialog between the conscious mind and the unconscious mind, in some sense. It's development dialog. It's not a fun game if you just direct it; it's only a fun game if you're inviting and something is welling up as a consequence. This is the same thing that happens when you're engaged in some kind of artistic or literary production. If it's all top-down, if you're forcing it, then it's propaganda. It's empty. What you want is to put yourself in a receptive state of mind, an imaginative state of mind. It's sort of half you and half nature itself, manifesting itself in your creative imagination. That was the sort of state that we were striving for.

When my client was relaxed, I asked her, well, what do you think about the snake handler? She said, well, he's probably a charlatan. He's just there trying to impress the crowd, and show off. She was afraid to go up there because she thought people would push her towards the snake, and she'd have to touch it. So there was a fear of the crowd issue going on there, too. I said, look, go up there, but do it under these conditions: if people get pushy, what are you going to tell

them? We figured out that she should tell them that she wants to look at the snake at her own pace, and that she doesn't need any encouragement or help, and it would be good if she was just left alone. That enabled her to defend herself. So she was afraid that the crowd would push her to do something that she didn't want to do. That was part of the theme of the dream. So, anyways, she eventually climbed the dune, in her imagination, and went into the crowd. The crowd turned out to be quite welcoming, and not hostile or pushy, which isn't what you'd expect, right? You'd think the crowd would've reacted in accordance with her fears, since it was her fantasy. But that's the thing about fantasies, they have this autonomous quality.

The crowd was welcoming, and not hostile, and it turned out the snake handler wasn't a charlatan. He was just an old guy who had this snake, and he was out there showing it to people because he thought it was a cool thing, and that maybe it was good for people to come and look at a snake. She got close enough to the snake to touch it. I'm telling you that because I want you to understand a bit more about what Jung was trying to do. He wrote these notebooks that haven't been published yet, called the [Black Books](#). The Black Books are the documentation of his experiments with his imagination. What he would do is daydream, like a child daydreams. He regained that faculty—although, with Jung, I think it was a faculty that never really disappeared. He had figures of imagination, that came to him, that he could speak with. He spoke with these figures of imagination, and documented that over a very long period of time. That was eventually distilled into a book called the [Red Book](#), which was published about three or four years ago. It was a book that Jung regarded as the central source from which all his inspiration emerged.

The way it looks, to me, is that we embody a lot of information in our action. Our action has developed as a consequence of imitating other people—not only the people around us, but, of course, the people around us imitated the people who came before them, and those people imitated the people who came before then, and so on, so far back that it's as far back as you can go. So you embody these patterns of behaviour that are extremely informative, that you don't understand, that are a consequence of collective imitation across the centuries. Then those patterns can become manifest as figures of the imagination. Those figures of imagination are the distillations of patterns of behaviour. As the distillations of patterns of behaviour, they have content. It's not you, that content. You could even think about it as content that's evolved. Although it's culturally transmitted, it's content that's evolved. And so these figures of the



imagination can reveal the structure of reality to you. That's what happened with Jung, and that's what he described in the Red Book. That was what permeated his psychology—a psychology that was based on the presupposition that the fundamental, archetypal structures of religious belief were not pathological, deceitful, or protective, in some delusional sense, against the fear of death, but quite the contrary: the very stories that enabled us to move forward as confident human beings in the face of chaos itself. I think it's conceivable that nothing more important, conceptually, happened in the 20th century than that.

It was the first time post-Enlightenment that a [rapprochement](#) between the intellect and the underlying, religious, archetypal substructure occurred. In the capacious intellect of Jung—the same thing happened, to some degree, with [Piaget](#)—the religious domain and the factual domain were brought back together. The fact of Jung's enduring and increasing popularity and influence, I would say, is a direct consequence of that. Some of his work has spun off into the New Age, and the New Age is a very optimistic and naive movement. It's predicated on the idea that you can do nothing, say, but follow your bliss, and that will take you ever-higher to enlightenment. That's not the Jungian idea, at all. The Jungian idea is that what you most need will be found where you least want to look.

So there's this story of King Arthur. King Arthur and his knights are all at a round table. They're all equals. They're all superordinate, but they're all equals. They go off to look for the Holy Grail. The Holy Grail is the container of the redemptive substance, whatever that is. It might be the cup that Christ used at the Last Supper, or it might be a chalice that was used to capture his blood, on the cross, when he was pierced by a sword. The stories differ, but that's the Holy Grail. The Holy Grail is lost—that's the redemptive substance. The knights of King Arthur go off to search for the Holy Grail, but they don't know where to look. Where do you look, when you don't know where to look, for something that you need, desperately, but have lost? Well, each of the knights goes into the forest at the point that looks darkest to him. That's Jungian psychoanalysis, in a nutshell: that which you fear and avoid, that which you hold in contempt, and that which disgusts you—that's the gateway to what you need to know. There's nothing New Age about that. That's for sure.

Now Jung, when he started this endeavour, started with this: this is part of the notebooks from the Black Books. He wrote: "My soul, my soul, where are you? Do you hear me? I speak, I call you—are you there? I have returned, I am here again. I have shaken the dust of all the lands from my feet, and I have come to



you, I am with you. After long years of long wandering, I have come to you again..."

For the Jungians, the hero's journey is a journey within. I think that that's probably the bias of introverts, to believe that the hero's journey is only an inward journey. I think that it can be an outward journey, too. I don't think it matters where you confront the unknown, whether it's within or without. What matters is whether or not you confront the unknown. That's what matters. But he found that what he had ignored was an undiscovered part of himself. That might be something that was equivalent to Huxley's notion that there was tremendous, potential breadth in the realm of human conscious experience

Huxley was influenced, to some degree, by Jung. Jung knew of Huxley's experiments, and had commented on psychedelic use. He said something, like, beware of wisdom that you did not earn. Jung was very good at stating things very profoundly, very simply. That's a very intelligent piece of advice: beware of wisdom that you did not earn. If you're interested in this sort of thing, he wrote a paper called [The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious](#), which is an absolute masterwork, but completely incomprehensible unless you know what it's about. What it's about is the danger of what he called ego inflation. One of the things that can happen, as a consequence of a revelatory experience, is that the division between the individual ego and...It's so hard to come up with a word that isn't, somehow, naive or cliched...To erase the relationship, the boundary, between the specific consciousness of the ego and the more generalized consciousness as such is a dangerous thing to do, because you can start to equate yourself—your specific self—with that more generalized consciousness as such. Jung thought about that as something akin to a psychotic inflation. The paper, The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious, is a document that tells you how to avoid that, if you're playing in this kind of realm. One of the injunctions is to keep your feet on the ground. He thought that Nietzsche wasn't grounded enough in life—he wasn't grounded enough in day-to-day rituals, routines, and the mundane. You can debate whether or not that's the case, whether or not that's a reasonable argument, but that was still what Jung believed.

Ok, so why am I telling you all of this? I'll finish with this: "From December 1913 onward, Jung carried on in the same procedure: deliberately evoking a fantasy in a waking state, and then entering into it as into a drama. These fantasies may be understood as a type of dramatized thinking in pictorial form..."

In retrospect, he recalled that his scientific question was to see what took place when he switched off consciousness. The example of dreams indicated the existence of background activity, and he wanted to give this a possibility of emerging, just as one does when taking mescaline. These journals are Jung's contemporaneous clinical ledger to his 'most difficult experiment,' or what he later describes as 'a voyage of discovery to the other pole of the world.'"

Jung believed that we were dreaming all the time, but that, during waking life, the pressure of external images was such that the fantasy imagery was of insufficient magnitude to be conscious. He believed that we were always situated in a dream, in relationship to the world.

When we started talking about the creation of the universe at the beginning of the Genesis stories, I spent quite a long time setting the stage for the stories, because there's no point in having a conversation about the God who gives rise to being unless you have some sense of what that might conceivably mean to the modern mind. I felt the same way about the Abrahamic stories. I couldn't get a handle on them until I could understand and articulate more clearly how a modern person might understand a direct experience of God.

The first question would be, is such a thing possible? The answer to that seems to be a qualified yes. First of all, it's a universal human experience. That's a very strange thing. It's not something that people have made up—as Freud might have it—as a defense against death. It's not a tenable hypothesis. It's a realm of potential experience. Now, that experience doesn't necessarily have to have the Judeo-Christian content that we've been discussing. Quite the contrary. There are manifestations of these alternative forms of consciousness, all over the world, that take on their own peculiar forms—although they are patterned, to some degree, like the hero myth. For example, a fight against a dragon seems to be unbelievably widespread. And so it's not as if it's random.

There's not much sense in having a discussion about what happens to Abraham unless you can conceptualize it in terms that are amenable to modern, sceptical consciousness. So we can establish the proposition that mystical experience is not only possible, but that it's quite common, and that it's inducible in a variety of ways. The manner in which it's inducible is reliable, and there's no evidence, as well, that it's pathological. In fact, there's a fair bit of evidence that the patterns of behaviour that are associated with the mystical experience are core elements of proper human adaptation in the world.

The Abrahamic stories open up with a manifest God. I'm going to read you some things from [Friedman](#), who wrote *The Disappearance of God*. He was trying to look at the underlying structure of the stories. Friedman noted that the books in the Old Testament were written by a lot of different people, at very different times. And then they were sequenced by other people, for reasons that we don't exactly understand. But there's still multiple, underlying narrative unities, despite the fact of that rather arbitrary sequencing. That's a strange thing. I guess you could say, if you had a collection of ancient books, and you were trying to put them together, you'd try to put them together in some way that made sense. It wouldn't make sense unless you stumbled across some kind of underlying narrative that allowed you to order them. And so it's not entirely surprising that they're ordered in a manner that's comprehensible.

Friedman commented on the underlying narrative structure: "The books of the Old Testament were composed by a great many authors, according to both traditional religious views and modern critical scholarship. The phenomena of the diminishing apparent presence of God across so many stories, through so many books, by so many authors, spread over so many centuries, is consistent enough to be striking, impressive, and ultimately mysterious.

"But the hiding of the divine face is only half of the story. There is another development, also extending across the course of the entire narrative of the Hebrew Bible, which we must see before we can appreciate the full force of this phenomenon, and before we can pose a solution to the mystery of how this happened. Gradually from Genesis to Ezra and Esther, there is a transition from divine to human responsibility for life on earth. "The story begins in Genesis with God in complete control of the creation, but by the end humans have arrived at a stage at which, in all apparent ways, they have responsibility for the fate of their world...The first two humans, Adam and Eve, take little responsibility themselves. They do not design or build anything. When they are embarrassed over their nudity they do not make clothes; they cover themselves with leaves. It is God who makes their first clothing for them." Noah: "By no means a fully developed personality, Noah is not an 'everyman' either. Broadly speaking, he reflects a step beyond Adam and Even in human character and responsibility..." Abraham: "Beyond the accounts of divine commands that Abraham carries out, the narrative also includes a variety of stories in which Abraham acts on his own initiative. He divides land with his nephew Lot; he battles kings; he takes concubines; he argues with his wife Sarah; on two occasions he tells kings that Sarah is his sister out of fear that they will kill him

to get his wife; he arranges his sons's marriage. In the place of the single story of Noah's drunkenness, there are in the case of Abraham the stories of a man's life. "The Abraham section thus develops the personality and character of a man to a new degree in Biblical narrative while picturing in him a new degree of responsibility...It is not just that Abraham is kinder, gentler, more intrepid, more ethical, or a better debater than his ancestor Noah. Rather, both Noah and the Abraham stories are pieces of a development of an increasingly stronger stance of humans relative to the deity. Before the story is over, humans will become a good deal stronger and bolder than Abraham."

I don't know what that means. It is certainly the case that the individual exists in the modern world—the differentiated, self-aware, self-conscious individual. It's certainly the case that that wasn't the case at some point in the past. And so it's the case that there's been a development. I don't know if you could call it a progression, but it was a development of the autonomous individual over some span of historical time. We don't know how long that's been, but my suspicions are that it hasn't been that long.

I read about a neolithic ceremony that involved the particular placement of a bear skull in a cave. And then I read that they had found these placements in caves that were at least 25,000 years old. And then I read that they found caves in Japan among the [Ainu](#), who were the indigenous inhabitants of Japanese territory, and a rather archaic people, who had the same ceremony with the bear, and that they put the skull in the same orientation and place in caves, and that that tradition remained unbroken for about 25,000 years. You think, well, is it possible for an oral or ritual tradition to remain unbroken for spans of tens of thousands of years? And the answer to that is, not only is it possible, but it's actually the norm. One chimpanzee is like the next chimpanzee in the biological progression. If you took a chimpanzee troop now, and you went back 25,000 years, and you looked at a chimpanzee troop, it'd be the same thing. There's no historical progression. That's how you can tell that chimps really don't have culture. If they could even accrete one one thousandth of a percent of transmission-able culture per generation, it wouldn't take more than about a million years before they'd have a whole civilization, and they don't; they're the same as they were.

The continuity, the stability and unchanging nature of the species, essentially speaking, is the rule. The variant is us. It's like, what the hell happened after the last ice age, 15,000 years ago? We went from tribal, uniform, stable to whatever the hell we are now. It's this transition from generic to specific. It's something

like that. I can't help but think that that's reflected in this text, and that it has something to do with this transition of consciousness from possession by the generic divine to dominance by the specific individual. It's something like that. Is that a neurological transformation? Is that what this is a record of? We don't know.

Jung's relationship with God as an object of belief is very complex. In his technical writing, Jung always talks about the image of God. He never talks about God; he talks about the image of God. He said that the image of God dwells within. That's not the same thing as God dwelling within. All of these capacities that we have for transcendent consciousness could be a byproduct of biological evolution. They could have no relationship whatsoever to an actual transcendent reality. There's no way of telling. The transcendent reality seems to manifest itself as an element of experience, but that doesn't mean that it has a reality outside of the subjective, even if it exists, as it clearly does.

Friedman suggests that what's happening in the Biblical narrative is the sequential emergence of the individual as a redemptive force, and that the Old Testament documents that, implicitly, unconsciously, as a consequence of descriptive fantasy. The cosmos is under the control of generic deity to begin with, something like that, and then that controls shifts to localized, identifiable, increasingly personal and detailed individuals. You see that in Noah, and then you see that in Abraham, and then you see that in Moses. And then there's this working out of what it would mean to be a fully developed individual.

These stories are like prototypes, attempts to bring about the proper mode of being. So Abraham is a manifestation of that, because he enters into a covenant with God. He's selected by God, or enters into a partnership with God. It's not exactly obvious. God provides him with forward motion and intuition, and leads him towards a successful mode of being. It's a complex, successful mode of being, because Abraham has a complex life. There's plenty of ups and downs. It's not unbroken purity of being towards a divine end. Abraham lies, cheats, deceives, and does all sorts of things that a real person would do. Moses, for example, kills someone. So the Biblical people are very genuine individuals, but with all their faults, all their sins, all their deceit, they're still put forth as models of potential proper being in the world. The entire corpus of the Bible seems to be nothing but an attempt to keep throwing up variants of the personality, trying to experiment to find out what personality works in the world. Of course, from the Christian perspective, that culminates in the figure of Christ as the redemptive

word, and that's associated—as we've already talked about—with the force that brought order out of chaos at the beginning of time. That's my attempt to provide proper context for the understanding of the Abrahamic stories. Hopefully, with that context, we can move forward being able to swallow the camel, so to speak, of the initial presence of God in the stories. We will return to all of that next week.

## IX: The Call to Abraham

So I've been thinking this week about doing this once a month, on continuing basis. If I do that, I think it'll be here, although it's harder to rent this theatre during the academic year. But if it isn't here, it'll be somewhere else. I'd like to continue doing this. I'm learning an awful lot from doing it. Once a month would really be good, because then I could really do the background work. I could probably do that for a couple of years. Obviously, this is going very quickly. But that's ok. It shouldn't go any faster than it can go. That's how it seems to me, anyways.

This has been a very steep learning curve for me, with regards to these stories. I didn't understand them very well. I've got better at using the resources online to help me do my background investigation. I have a lot of books. Some of you may have noticed that, online, I've posted a [conversation](#) I had with Jonathan Pageau and his brother, Matthieu. I hope it's Matthieu. Names escape me so badly, but I believe that's right. He just finished a book on the Bible. I've been doing a lot of thinking and talking about these stories, trying to understand what they're about. And then there's all these commentaries. There's a great—I think it's called Bible Hub, that has every single verse of the Bible listed there. With each verse, they've aggregated 10 commentaries from about 10 commentators from the last 400 years. So there's like a dense page on every line.

That's one of the things that's really interesting about this book, too: it's aggregated so much commentary that it's much bigger than it looks. The book is much bigger than it looks. It's been very interesting to become familiar with those, too. The fact that this site is set up with all the commentaries, split up by verses, means that you can rapidly compare the commentaries, and get a sense of how people have interpreted this over at least several hundred years—but, of course, much longer than that: the people who wrote the commentaries were reading things that were older than that. So that's been very, very interesting.

Last week we talked about a couple of things. We talked about how you might understand the idea of the divine encounter. And then we also paralleled that with the idea that God disappears in the Old Testament—he bows out as the stories progress. That seems to be an emergent property of the sequencing of the stories, right? All the books were written by independent people, and then they were aggregated by other people. And so the narrative continuity is some kind of

emergent property that is a consequence of this interaction between readers and writers over centuries. It's strange that, given that, there are also multiple coherent narratives that unite it. It's really not that easy to understand that. But it does, at least, seem to be the case.

The third thing we talked about was that, as God bows out, so to speak, the individual personalities of the human characters that are involved seem to become more and more developed. What it means is that God steps away, and man steps forward. That's what it means. But why it's arranged like that—or, say, the ultimate significance of that—is by no means clear.

So Abraham, who we're going to concentrate on today, is quite a well-developed character. I would say there are multiple endings and beginnings in the Biblical stories. The most important ending, I suppose, is the ending of the Garden of Paradise, and the disenchantment of the world, and the sending forth of Adam and Eve into history—into the future, and into a mode of being that has a future as part of it, and that has history as part of it, and that has the necessity of sacrifice and toil as part of it. That's obviously crucial. That is replayed with the story of Noah, because everything is destroyed, and then the world is created anew. Sacrifices have to be made in order for the world to begin. And then you see the same thing happen, again, after the Noah story and the Tower of Babel.

History, as we really understand history, seems to start with Abraham. The stories of Abraham sound like historical stories. Scholars debate the historical accuracy of the Bible. I suppose there's no way of ever determining once and for all the degree to which you might regard the accounts as equivalent to modern, empirical history. This is a psychological interpretation of the Biblical stories, not a historical interpretation. It certainly does seem to be the case that, from a psychological perspective, we enter something like the domain of a relatively modern conceptualization of history with Abraham.

"Beyond the accounts of divine commands that Abraham carries out"—this is from [Friedman](#), the man I mentioned in the last lecture, who wrote [The Disappearance of God](#) and a variety of other books that are well-worth reading—"the narrative also includes a variety of stories in which Abraham acts on his own initiative. He divides land with his nephew Lot; he battles kings, he takes concubines; he argues with his wife Sarah; on two occasions he tells kings that Sarah is his sister out of fear that they will kill him to get his wife; he arranges his sons's marriage. In the place of the single story of Noah's drunkenness, there are in the case of Abraham the stories of a man's life."



One of the things I was really struck by—reading this in depth, and reading the commentary—is how much like a story about a person it is. Abraham isn't a divine figure in any archetypal sense. I mean, he has archetypal elements, because he's obviously the founder of a nation, but, fundamentally, he's a human being. He has adventures, and he makes the mistakes of a human being. It's the mistake part that really struck me.

I was talking with a friend of mine this week, [Norman Doidge](#), who's a very remarkable person, in many ways. He was taking me to task. He was reading my book, which will be out in January. In the book, in one section, I contrasted the God of the Old Testament with the God of the New Testament. I made the case, sort of based on [Northrop Frye's](#) ideas, that the God of the Old Testament was really harsh and judgemental, and that the God of the New Testament was more merciful, and, at least to some degree, more sweetness and light. Norman took me to task about that, saying that was an overly Christianized interpretation, which would make sense, because I derived it in part from Northrop Frye. I really have come to understand that he's right about that.

The God in the Old Testament is actually far more merciful than he's made out to be. It's good news, fundamentally, if you regard the representation of God as somehow key to the description of being itself. Abraham makes a lot of serious mistakes, and yet he has a life, and he's blessed by God, despite the fact that he's pretty deeply flawed, and engages in deceptive practice. He's a good man, but he's not a perfect man, by any stretch of the imagination. Things work out really well for him, and he's the founder of a nation, and all of that. That's good news for everyone, because perfect people are very, very hard to find. If the only pathway to having a rich and meaningful life was through perfection, then we would all be in deep trouble. That's very satisfying, to read that.

The other thing that I've been struck by is that Abraham—and I think this is actually absolutely key to the interpretation of this story—goes out and does things. That's the thing. One of the things that I've noticed in my life is that nothing I've ever done was wasted. By 'done,' I mean put my heart and soul into it—attempted with all of my effort. That always worked. Now, it didn't always work the way I expected it to work. That's a whole different issue. But the payoff from it was always positive. Something of value always accrued to me when I made the sacrifices necessary to do something worthwhile. And so I think part of the message in the Abrahamic stories is—go do something. I've thought about this in a variety of ways outside of the interpretation of the story.

I have this program—some of you might be familiar with it—which is called the [Future Authoring Program](#). It's designed to help people make a plan for three to five years into the future. What you do is answer some questions—it's a writing program—about how you would like your life to be, what you would like your character to be, three to five years down the road, if you were taking care of yourself like you were taking care of someone that you actually cared about. You kind of have to split yourself into two people, and treat yourself like someone you have respect for and want the best for. That's not easy, because people don't necessarily have respect for themselves, and they don't necessarily want the best for themselves. They have a lot of self-contempt, and a lot of self-hatred, a lot of guilt, a lot of existential angst, and a lot of self-consciousness, and all of that. And so people don't necessarily take care of themselves very well. I think you have an obligation—it's one of the highest moral obligations—to treat yourself as if you're a creature of value that is, in some sense, independent of your actions. You might think about that, metaphorically, as a recognition of your divine worth, in the Biblical sense, regardless of your sins, so to speak. I think that's powerful language, once you understand it.

Anyways, with the [Self Authoring Program](#) and the [Future Authoring Program](#), you answer questions about how you would like your friendships to be conducted. It's useful to surround yourself with people who are trying to move forward, and, more importantly, who are happy when you move forward, and not happy when you move backwards—not when you fall; that isn't what I mean. When you're doing self-destructive things, your friends shouldn't be there to cheer you on, because then they're really not acting like friends, obviously. I know it's obvious, but it still happens all the time, and people allow it to happen. It's not a good idea.

How would you like to sort your family out? I was thinking about this, too, because I was thinking about Noah's ark. There was a phrase in that story that I didn't understand, which was that "Noah was perfect in his generations." I thought, I don't know what that means. When you're going through a book like the Bible, if you don't understand a phrase, that actually means you missed something. It doesn't mean that that's just not germane to the story: that means you're stupid. You didn't get it, man. You didn't get it. You didn't understand it. The idea that Noah was perfect in his generations, and that's why he could build an ark that would sustain him and humanity itself through the flood, meant that, not only did he walk with God—which is something that we talked about in the context of the Sermon on the Mount—but that he established proper

relationships with his family, with his children. What that meant was that, not only was he well integrated as a person, but his level of integration had reached the point where it stretched out beyond him, and encompassed his family. So it was Noah and the family that was in the ark.

I really understood this, this year. I had a really tumultuous year. You can think about it from a personal perspective. I can think about it as a year that had no shortage of floods. Part of the reason that I was able to get through it—I also had terrible health problems—was because my family really came together around me: my kids, my wife, my parents, and my friends, as well—particularly a certain group of friends. All of that came together in my mind this week. I thought, oh, that's what it means to be perfect in his generations. It meant that he hadn't just straightened himself out: he'd also straightened out his relationships with his family. I can tell you that, when crisis strikes you—which it will. It will. The floods will come. That's why the apocalypse is always upon us. The flood will definitely come in your life, and the degree that you've organized yourself psychologically, and also healed the relationships between you and your family, could be the critical element that determines whether you live or die when a crisis comes, or whether someone in your family lives or dies. So the idea of the ark containing the man who walks with God, and whose generations are perfect, and that that's what sustains humanity through the crisis—you couldn't be more psychologically accurate than that.

I was thinking about another line in the New Testament, this week. I think it's from the Sermon on the Mount, but I'm not absolutely sure. Christ compares the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed. A mustard seed is a very tiny seed. It grows into quite a spectacular, complex plant. I was thinking about how you should operate in the world in order to make it a better place, assuming that that's what you should be doing. That is what you should be doing. There's lots in the world to fix. Everything that bothers you about the world, and about yourself, should be fixed. You can do that. My dawning realization...

I have a friend. He lives in Montreal. His name is James Simon. He's a great painter, and he's taught me a lot of things. He's helped me design my house, and beautify it. I bought some paintings from him a couple of years ago. He did this series of paintings where he went around North America, and stood in different places, and then he painted the view from here down. And so it's his feet planted in different places: on roads, on the desert, in the ocean. I have one, actually, hanging over my toilet, which is him standing over a urinal. Well, you know, he was trying to make a point. The point was that, wherever you are, it's

worth paying attention. So all these places that he visited, he looked at exactly where he was: standing by the side of the road in the desert—kind of mundane, in some sense. But then, maybe he put 40 hours into that painting, and it's very, very realistic, with really good light. What he's telling you as a painter is, everything is worth paying attention to an infinite amount, but you don't have enough time. The artist does that for you. The artist looks and looks and looks and looks, and then gives you that vision, so then you can look at the painting. It reminds you that everything that there is, is right where you are. That's a hard thing to realize, but it's actually true.

I've been telling people online, in various ways, and in lectures, that they should start fixing up the world by cleaning up their room. I wanted to just elaborate on that a little bit before I get back to the lecture itself. So it's become this weird internet meme. It's a joke, and good: it's a joke. I'm really happy about the fact that so much of this has got humor in it. That's really important. That's what stops things from degenerating into conflict. I was thinking about this idea of cleaning up your room in relationship to the mustard seed idea.

The thing about cleaning up your room... This is also something I learned from Carl Jung and his studies on alchemy. For Jung, when the alchemist was attempting to make the [philosopher's stone](#), he was not only engaged in the transformation of the material world, but he was engaged in a process of self-transformation that occurred at the same time as the chemical transformation. It was a psychological work, in some sense.

Let's say you want to sort out your room, and beautify it, because the beauty is also important. Let's say all you have is just a little room. You're not rich; you're poor, and you don't have any power. But you've got your damn room, and you've got this space right in front of you that's a part of the cosmos, that you can come to grips with. You might think, well, what's right in front of you? The answer to that is, it depends on how open your eyes are. That's the proper answer. William Blake said this, for example—Aldous Huxley made comments that were very similar: in a transcendent state, you can see infinity in the finite. You might say, well, you can see infinity in what you have within your grasp, if you look. You could say, maybe, that's the case with your room.

So you want to clean up your room. Ok, how do you do that, exactly? Well, a room is a place to sleep. If you set your room up properly, then you figure out how to sleep, and when you should sleep, and how you should sleep. And then you figure out when you should wake up, and then you figure out, well, what

you figure out when you should wake up, and then you figure out, well, what clothes you should wear, because they have to be arranged properly in your dresser, and then you have to have some place to put your clothes. If you're going to have some clothes, you have to figure out what you're going to wear those clothes to do. That means you have to figure out what you're going to do, and then your room has to serve that purpose. Otherwise, it isn't set up properly. If it doesn't serve your purposes, you will be unhappy in the room, because the way that we perceive the world is as a place to move from point A to point B in. And then, if the place that we're in facilitates that movement, then we're happy to be there. If the place that we're in serves as an obstacle to that movement, then we're unhappy to be there. And so, to set up your room means that you have to have somewhere to go that's worthwhile, or you can't set up your room. And then your room has to be set up to facilitate that.

The next thing is, well, maybe you have to make it beautiful. That's not easy, right? That means you have to have some taste, and that doesn't mean you have to have money. It doesn't. You can be garish with money, and you can be tasteful with nothing. All you need is taste, and taste beats money when it comes to beatifying things—not that money is trivial, because it's not, but taste is crucial. People who are very artistically oriented can make beautiful things out of virtually nothing. The literature suggests that, if you're going to make beautiful things, putting real constraints on what you allow yourself to do facilitates creativity, instead of interfering with it.

Let's say you have to make something out of nothing—which, I suppose, would be a Godly act. You have to make something out of nothing; you have to be creative in order to do that. So then, to beautify your room means that you also have to develop your capacity to be creative, so then you can make your room shine. But then what will happen, if your family isn't together, they'll interfere with that—you'll interfere with that, because you won't have the discipline to do it properly. But then, when you start building this little microcosm of perfection with what you have at hand, it'll evoke all the pathologies of everyone in your household. They'll wonder what the hell you're up to, in there. They won't necessarily be happy, because if they're in a lowly place, let's say, and so are you, and you're trying to move out of that, then the higher you move out of that, the more the place they're in looks bad. You might say, well, what they should do is celebrate your victory over chaos and evil, but that isn't what will happen. What will happen, instead, is that they will attempt to pull you back down.

I mean, obviously, all families don't do that, but all families do that to some

degree, and some families do almost nothing but that. What that means is that, if you're going to organize your room, then you're going to have to confront the devils in your house. That's often a terrifying thing; some of those devils have lineages that go back many, many, many generations. God only knows what you have to struggle with in order to overcome that. And so, to sort yourself out, and to fix up your room, is a nontrivial matter. You'll learn by doing that, and then, maybe, you can fix up your family a little bit, and then, having done that, you'll have enough character so that, when you try to operate in the world—at your job, or maybe in the broader social spheres—you'll be a force for good, instead of harm. You'll have learned some humility by noting just how difficult it was to put your damn room together—and yourself, for that matter. You'll proceed cautiously, with your eyes open, towards the good.

Those are some of the things I've been thinking about this week. They're germane to what we're going to discuss tonight. What happens at the beginning of the Abrahamic stories is, basically, God comes to Abraham and just says, go. Get going, man. Do something! Get going! You might think, well, where should I go? God is somewhat vague about that. Where he sends Abraham—it's a real fixer-upper, man. There's starvation there, and there's tyranny, and there's marital dissolution, and there's deceit. It's just like where you live, you know? It's exactly the same thing. It's tyranny and catastrophe. That's the tyrannical Great Father.

Abraham ends up having to sojourn in Egypt. There's a famine, and so mother nature's on the rampage. Abraham lies about his wife, as we'll see. So it's the world. It's tyranny, vulnerability, and deceit. And yet, God says, go, because if you do go, then you'll become a father of nations. And you think, again, that's pretty good news, although it's strange. You'd expect that, if God chose Abraham, he'd send him immediately to the land of milk and honey. That isn't what happens, at all, and Abraham never gets there. But his mission is still regarded as divine, and thank God for that. That's what your mission will be, because that's what you'll encounter in your life. Those are archetypal things that everyone encounters: the tyranny of the social structure, the rapaciousness of nature, and the deceitful quality of the human psyche. That's the world.

That's a negative view, in some sense, but it's positive in the story. What it basically says is something that's akin to the Sermon on the Mount, which is that, if you're aligned with God, and you pay attention to the divine injunction, then you can operate in the midst of chaos, tyranny, and deception, and flourish. You could hardly hope to have a better piece of news than that—given that that's

You could hardly hope to have a better piece of news than that, given that that's exactly where you are. I didn't see any of that in the Abrahamic stories, to begin with. It's been very interesting to have that reveal itself.

"The Abraham section thus develops the personality and character of a man to a new degree in the Biblical narrative while picturing in him a new degree of responsibility..."

So here's the other thing that's really struck me, and I think this is of absolutely crucial importance. I don't know of how much importance, but it's certainly important to me. One of the things that has just blown me away in the last year—because I've talked to lots of people live, but also lots of people online, but it's more obvious live, and it's obvious in this theatre, as well. I've gone around and spoken, and a large proportion of my audience has been young men under 30. I've spoken to them a lot about responsibility. What's so odd about this is that, of all the things that I've spoken about—because I can see the audience, and I can feel how the audience is reacting. I'm always paying attention to all of you, insofar as I can manage that. I get some sense of how what I'm saying is landing, which you have to do if you're going to speak effectively to people. What happens is that, if I talk about responsibility, everyone is silent, just like they are now. Just silent, and not moving. Focusing, attentive. I say, pick up your responsibility. Pick up the heaviest thing you can, and carry it. The room goes quiet, and everybody's eyes open. I think...It always makes me break up. I don't know why.

I was speaking to an English journalist today. He was going to write an article in Spectator magazine. I was talking about this. At the same point in the discussion, I had the same emotional reaction. I don't really understand it. There's something about it that's so crucial. We've been fed this unending diet of rights and freedoms, and there's something about that that's so pathologically wrong. People are starving for the antidote, and the antidote is truth and responsibility. It isn't because that's what you should do in some I know better, or someone knows better than you, for you, sense. It's that that's the secret to a meaningful life. Without a meaningful life, all you have is suffering, nihilism, self-contempt, despair, and all of that. That's not good.

It's necessary for men to stand up and take responsibility. They all know that, and they are starving for that message. The message is more that that's also a good thing, to stand up and take responsibility. You're cursed so much now, from when you're young, with this notion that your active engagement with the

world is part of what is destroying and undermining the planet, and adding to the tyranny of the social systems. How about not so much of that, ok? It's too soul-deadening. It's antihuman, right to the core. My sense, instead, is that if you are able to reveal the best of yourself to you and the world, that you would be an overwhelming force for good. Whatever errors that might be made along the way would wash out in the works.

That's the other thing that you see in the Abrahamic stories. Abraham is not a perfect person, by any stretch of the imagination. He's a real person. He makes mistakes, but it doesn't matter: the overarching narrative is, maintain your covenant with God, and, despite your inadequacies, not only will you prevail, but your descendants will prevail. It's like, great. That's really good news. It's been really something to see that in the stories. So that's responsibility.

"It is not just that Abraham is kinder, gentler, more intrepid, more ethical, or a better debater than his ancestor Noah. Rather, both the Noah and the Abraham stories are pieces of a development of an increasingly stronger stance of humans relative to the deity. Before the story is over, humans will become a good deal stronger and bolder than Abraham." That's really something to say, because Abraham is pretty bold. So let's read the stories. The first one is about Abraham, Sarah, and Lot. "Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram"—so his name's Abram, to begin with, and that actually turns out to be important. It's not Abraham—"Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot"—so Haran is Abram's brother—"And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees. And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah. "But Sarai was barren; she had no child. And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan"—so that's exile—"and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran."

There's a reason that Sarai is introduced as barren: it's to set the stage. I think it was Anton Chekhov that said, when he was talking about the stage setting for a play, that if there was a rifle hanging on the wall, it had better be used before, I believe, the second act, or it shouldn't be hanging there, at all. So this is stage setting. Part of the reason that the Biblical writers are pointing out that Abram's wife is barren is because it's a real catastrophe for Abraham, and for Sarai, as well. that she's barren. It's showing the trouble that Abraham's in at the



beginning of the story. It's also... See, what happens as the story progresses is that Abram and Sarai are eventually granted a son, but it's way late in the story, and they're very, very old by the time it happens. And, of course, you're not going to be a father of nations without having a child. The writers are attempting to make the case that, if you forthrightly pursue that which God directs you to pursue, let's say, then all things are possible. That's the idea in the narrative.

You might say that's naive. It's not. You think it when you're naive, right? And then you dispense with that idea. And then, when you stop being the sort of person who dispenses with ideas, you come to another place. That's the place where you have no idea what might be possible for you, if you got things together, and pursued what you should pursue. You don't know how much of what's impossible to you, right now, would be become possible under those conditions. It's an unknown phenomena.

I've watched people put themselves together, across time, incrementally and continually. They become capable of things that are not only jaw-droppingly amazing, but, sometimes, metaphysically impossible to understand. So we don't know the limits of human endeavour. We truly don't. It's premature to put a cap on what it is that we are, or what it is that we're capable of. You're already something, and maybe you're not so bad in your current configuration. But you might wonder, if you did nothing for the next 30 years except put yourself together, just exactly what would you be able to do? You might think that's worth finding out. But, of course, that's the adoption of responsibility.

One thing that I've also learned over the years... I've been curious about this battle between meaning and nihilism. I could see for a long while the rationale in nihilism, and the power of the nihilistic argument. But it occurred to me, across time, that the power of the nihilistic argument is more powerful than naive optimism, but it's not more powerful than the optimism that is not naive. The optimism that is not naive says, it's self-evident that the world is a place of suffering, and that there are things to be done about that. It's self-evident that people are flawed, and that there's things to be done about that. The non-naive optimist says, the suffering could be reduced, and the insufficiency could be overcome, if people oriented themselves properly, and did what they were capable of doing. I do not believe that that's deniable.

I think that human potential is virtually limitless, and that there's nothing, perhaps, that's beyond our grasp, if we're careful as individuals, and as a society. I think that there's no reason for nihilism, and that there's no reason for

society. I think that there's no reason for nihilism, and that there's no reason for hopelessness, and there's no reason to bow down before evil. We're capable of so much more. I think that you can easily—you know that, first, because you're not happy with who you are, and you're ashamed and embarrassed about it, as you should be. And you know it because, if you look out there, you see people who are capable of doing great things, and you know that we're not giving it our all. And, still, we're not doing so badly. You might wonder, if we devoted 90 percent of our effort to putting things right, instead of 55 percent of our effort, or maybe even less than that, just how well could things be put together? I think that you can figure that out by starting with your room, by the way.

"Now the Lord said unto Abram"—this is the opening of the story—"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:"

This is one of those phrases where every clause is significant. Go somewhere you don't understand! That's the first thing: "get thee out of thy country." Back in the 1920s, there was a whole slew of American writers who ended up as expatriates in Paris—Hemingway among them, Fitzgerald, and a variety of others. It was very inexpensive in Paris, at the time. Part of their transformation into great literary figures was the fact that they were out of their country. Now they could see what their country was, because you can't see what your country is until you leave it. So you have to go into the unknown. That's God's first command: go into the unknown! You already know what you know, and that's not enough, unless you think you're enough. And if you're not enough, and you don't think you're enough, then you have to go where you haven't been. And so that's the first commandment to Abraham. That's a good one. That makes perfect sense: go to where you don't know. Yes.

"And from thy kindred." Well, what does that mean? It means grow up! That's what it means. It means get away from your family enough so that you can establish your independence. And that isn't because there's something wrong with your family—although, perhaps there is, as there is, perhaps, wrong with you—but it means get away. I talk to people very frequently whose families have provided them with too much protection, and they know it themselves. That means they're deprived of necessity.

One of the things that you see in the United States, for example, is that the children of first generation immigrants often do better than their children. The reason for that is that the children of first generation immigrants have necessity

driving them. You don't know how much you need necessity to drive you, because maybe you're not very disciplined. If a catastrophe doesn't immediately befall you when you don't act forthrightly, then maybe you never act forthrightly, right? The gap between your foolishness and the punishment is lengthened by your unearned wealth, so you never grow up and learn. You have to get yourself away from your dependency in order to allow necessity to drive you forward. That's to become independent, and to become mature.

I think part of what's happening in our culture is that the force that's attacking the forthright movement forward of young men, in particular, is afraid of the power of men. It's confused about the distinction between power and authority and competence. A man who has authority and competence has power as a byproduct. But the authority and competence is everything. People who can't understand that fail to make the distinction between power and authority of competence. They're afraid of power, and so they destroy authority and competence. That's a terrible thing, because we need authority and competence. What else is going to allow us to prevail in the long run? And so you get away from your country, and you get away from your kin, and from your father's house, right? And you go out there, and you establish yourself in the world. It's a call to adventure. The first lines in the Abrahamic stories is a call to adventure. Great.

"Unto a land that I will shew thee." Well, what does that mean? I've been struck very hard by a number of writers, Carl Jung, obviously, among them. I mean, he wrote things, like Nietzsche, that, if you understand them, they just break you into pieces. One of the things that Jung understood, and the psychoanalysts understand, is one of the most terrifying elements of psychoanalytic thinking, and is very tightly allied with religious thinking, which is that you are not the master of your own house: there are spirits that dwell within you, meaning, you have a will, and you can exercise a certain amount of conscious control over your being, but there are all sorts of things that occur within you that seem to be beyond your capacity to control. Your dreams, for example—that's a really good example—or your impulses. You might think of those as so foreign from you that you don't even want them to be part of you. But more subtly, even, how about what you're interested in, what compels you? Where does that come from, exactly? You can't conjure it up of your own accord.

So if you're a student, and you're taking a difficult course, you might say to yourself, well, I need to sit down and study for three hours. But then you sit down and that isn't what happens: your attention goes everywhere. You might

down, and that isn't what happens. Your attention goes everywhere. You might say, well, whose attention is it, then, if it goes everywhere? You say it's your attention. Heh. Well, if it's your attention, maybe you'd be able to control it, but you can't. And so then you might think, well, then just exactly what the hell is controlling it? And you might say, it's random. Well, it better not be random. I can tell you that. That happens to some degree in schizophrenia. There's an element of randomness in that. It's not random. It's driven by the action of phenomena that I think are best considered as something like subpersonalities—although, even that is only a partial description.

You can't make yourself interested in something. Interest manifests itself, and grips you. That's a whole different thing. So what is it that's gripping you? How do you conceptualize that? Is that a divine power? Well, it's divine as far as you're concerned, because it grips you, and you can't do anything about it. So there's a calling in you towards what you're compelled by, and what you're interested in. Sometimes that might be quite dark, and sometimes not. But you're compelled forward by your interest. And so the idea that what moves you away from your country, and your father's house, and the comforts of your childhood home is something that's beyond you, and that you listen to and harken to. That's exactly right.

You can say, well, I don't want to call that God. It doesn't matter what you call it, exactly. It doesn't matter to what it is, to what it's called: it still is. If you do not listen to it—and I've been a clinician, and talked to enough people now, as old as I am, to know this absolutely: if you do not listen to that thing that beckons you forward, you will pay for it like you cannot possibly imagine. You'll have everything that's terrible about life in your life, and nothing about it that's good. And, worse, you'll know that it was your fault, and that you squandered what you could have had. This is not only a calling forth, but it's a warning.

"Unto a land that I will shew thee." That's it: "that I will shew thee." And you don't want to be too concrete about this. There's all sorts of new territories that you can inhabit. There's abstract and conceptual territories. If you go to university and you study biology, or you study physics, or any discipline, you're in a territory, right? You're in the territory that all the scholars have established, and then, as you master the discipline, you move out beyond the established territory, into the unknown. That's a new land, right? Maybe it's even a land of your enemies, for that matter. But it's a new land. The frontier's always in front of you.

When the earth was less inhabited than it is now, the psychological frontier and the geographical frontier was the same thing, and now they've separated, to some degree. There's not so much geographical frontier, but the frontier's a place that never disappears. The land that's beyond the land that you know is always there, and it's always where you should go. All of that's packed into these four phrases.

You look at the world through a story. You can't help it. The story is what gives value to the world, or the story's what you extract from the value of the world. You can look at it either way. You're somewhere, and it's not good enough. That's the eternal human predicament: wherever you are isn't good enough. To some degree, that's actually a good thing, because if it was good enough, well, there's nothing for you to do. So it's actually, maybe, a good thing that it's insufficient. That might be why, sometimes, having less is better than having more. I don't want to be a [pollyanna](#) about that. I mean, I know that there's deprivation that can reach to the point where it's completely counterproductive. But it isn't always the case that...If you start with little, you start with more possibility. It's something like that. So you always move from what's unbearable about the present, to some better future, right? And if you don't have that, then you have nothing but threat and negative emotion. You have no positive emotion, because the positive emotion is generated in the conception of the better future, and in the evidence, that you generate yourself, that you're moving towards it. That's where the positive and fulfilling meaning of life comes.

So you want to set up this structure properly. It's very, very important. What it means is that you want to be going somewhere where it's good enough so that the going is worth the while—and you can ask yourself that. That's partly what we tried to build into the [Future Authoring Program](#): We know what's wrong with life. It's rife with suffering, insufficiency, deception, and evil. It's all of that, obviously. What would make the journey worthwhile? Well, you can ask yourself that. It's like, all right; in order to bear up under this load, what is it that I would need to be striving to attain? And if you ask yourself that, that's to knock, and the door will open. That's what that means: if you ask yourself that, then you will find an answer. You'll shrink away from it; you'll think, well, there's no way I could do that. Well, you don't know what you could do. You don't know what's possible, and you're not as much as you could be. God only knows what you could do and have and give if you sacrificed everything to it.

That's the reason Abraham is constantly making sacrifices. It's archaic, right? He's burning up like baby lambs. Well, they're alive; that's something. And

He's burning up, like, baby Iamus. Well, they're alive, that's something. And they're valuable; that's something. You have to admit—even if you think about it as a modern person—that the act of sacrificing something might have some dramatic compulsion to it. To go out into a flock, and take something that's newborn, and to cut its throat, and to bleed it, and to burn it, might be a way of indicating to yourself that you're actually serious about something. It isn't so obvious that we have rituals of seriousness like that, now. And so it's not so obvious that we're actually serious about anything. And so maybe that's not such a good thing. Maybe we shouldn't be thinking that these people were so archaic and primitive and superstitious. It's possible that they knew something that we don't.

In the Abrahamic stories, one of the things that maintains Abraham's covenant with God is his continual willingness to sacrifice. That sacrificial issue is so important: you are not committed to something unless you are willing to sacrifice for it. Commitment and sacrifice are the same thing. It borders on miraculous that those concepts are embedded into this narrative at the level of dramatic actions, instead of abstract explanation. People are acting this out. The fundamental conception is so profound; it's quite awe-inspiring. It's breathtaking, really, when you understand what message is trying to be conveyed. You have to make sacrifices. What do you have to sacrifice? You have to sacrifice that which is most valuable to you, currently, that's stopping you. God only knows what that is—it's certainly the worst of you. It's certainly that. God only knows to what degree you're in love with the worst of you.

You move from the unbearable present to the ideal future, and you can't help that. You have to live in a structure like that. That's your house—that's another way of thinking about it. If you want to get your house in order, and if you want it to be a place that you can live properly, then you have to plan the future that is perfect. And then I think, well, what does that mean? It means that it's good for you.

One of the things that I do all the time with my clinical and consulting clients is to try to figure out what would be good for them. But we do more than that: we try to think, ok, how can we set this up so it's really good for you, and that all the side consequences of that are good for other people? People are often, also, timid about trying to get something that's good for themselves. They feel that it's selfish, or that they don't deserve it. We set it up so that it's plainly obvious that it will not harm the structure of the universe for you to have what you need, and to do it in a way that's a benefit to other people. There's no downside to

that. And so it's ok if you reach out and take that.

One of the things that's interesting about the Biblical stories—the Abrahamic stories, as well—is that God doesn't really seem to be opposed to the success of the people that he's chosen. What happens to them, as they progress through their journey, is that they get larger flocks, and they get more authority, and they get life more abundant. That's what happens. God doesn't seem to be a miser in the Old Testament: if you put in the effort, and you accept the covenant, and you accept the sacrifices, then you get to be successful, and maybe successful beyond your wildest dreams. That actually seems to be ok with God. That's pretty cool, given the general notion of Old Testament God as only casting out curses and death wherever he happens to wander. I mean, there's certainly no shortage of that. But, again, it seems to me that that's very good news, and that you also don't have to be perfect in order to have that happen.

This is the issue about going into the unknown. If you leave your country and your kin and your father's house, and you go out into a land that your intuition guides you to, you're going to undergo these radical transformations. This is a sacrificial transformation, too, because you're moving forthrightly and voluntarily into chaos. That's the same as the dragon fight. That's the hero's story. What will happen, there, is that you will transform yourself. And so the call to an ideal is also the call to a sequence of deaths and rebirths that move you closer and closer to the ideal. That's what God is calling Abraham to do in the first sentence of the story.

You see these things echoed in the strangest places. These are stills that I took from Pinocchio. This little cricket is the still, small voice, right? That's the thing that calls to you. It's your conscience, in part; it's your intuition, in part. It's the thing that opens up the great, sacred book of the world. That's what happens, here. The animators are at pains to show you that. It's a leather-bound book with gilt lettering. It's a valuable book. It's something that's quiet that's showing it to you. You have to meditate. You have to be somewhere where the world isn't drowning you out in order to understand how to open this, to listen to that voice that tells you where you should go, what you should do next. And then what happens is that something beckons to you in the night. It's a star. It's something that transcends the horizon. It glitters. It's brilliant. It's not day-to-day. It's something that's beyond you—something that represents a transcendent ideal, and then makes it manifest to you, if you're quiet enough to listen. That's what you wish upon, so strangely, right?

People do that: they wish upon a star. They teach their children that, and they don't know why. What do you mean you wish upon a star? What in the world does that mean? It means you lift your eyes to the heavens, and make a pact with the transcendent, and then your heart's desire will come to you. That's what it means. That's not naive. It's the most sophisticated thing that you can know, and it's the birth of the hero.

That's the nativity star, obviously. This is where it takes place: anywhere. The person is just a carpenter and a toymaker. But that's pretty good, a carpenter. If you're a deceitful carpenter, then your house falls down. And if you're a toymaker, then you love children. That's a good start. Geppetto, who lives in—it's not a grand house. It's just an everyday house, but everything that's happening in it is good. That means it's a palace, because everything in it that's happening is good. There's this saying—and I don't remember where it came from—that it's better to have bread and water in peace than a feast in conflict. That's not a saying; that's just the darkest possible description of the truth. There's nothing worse than eating a grand meal with people you hate and despise, that are at each other's throats. It's much better to have bread and water in peace. It's just clearheaded analysis of the structure of the world, to say things like that. And so the magical transformation can happen in the most mundane of places. The reason for that is that the mundane nature of places is an illusion. Every place is the potential birthplace of the kingdom of God. That's the case. Geppetto is a good guy. He has a kitten. The kitten likes him. He makes puppets, and he's a humble person. He knows that, compared to the ideal that he's attempting to subscribe to, he's—he's not abased before it, or anything like that. He's not despicable in relationship to it. But the reason he's on his knees is because the thing he's pointing at is above him. It wouldn't be the right aim if it wasn't above him. The fact that he's on his knees is only an indication that his aim is proper: you should be on your knees to something that you actually admire. And if you don't feel like being on your knees in front of it, then perhaps you don't actually admire it, and then that means you haven't got the stage set properly. But your aim should be something that fills you with awe. Why do something else? Well, perhaps because it's easy, and perhaps because it's malevolent, and all of those things. But those are no answers to the problems that beset you. They just make things worse, and that's clear. And so then Geppetto, having made his pact—his covenant, just like Abraham—falls into a dream. The rest of the movie actually takes place in a dream. It's the dream within which transformation takes place. That's laid out, at least in part—time stops in the Pinocchio story. Everything happens to Pinocchio, in some sense, in a land that's



outside of normal time. That's the infinite archetypal space. That's a real place. The infinite and the finite coexist, and most of the time we're in the place of the finite, but that doesn't mean that the place of infinite doesn't exist. It just means that we can't get access to it. We get intimations of it, from time to time. When things are going perfectly well for you, on those rare occasions when everything comes together, for the brief moment, you inhabit that divine place, and you have some sense of what your life could be like, if you organized it from the smallest element to the largest element. That's a place that you can inhabit, if not forever, in a manner that, at least, felt like forever. Because of Geppetto's decision, the transcendent manifests itself. It takes the form of the blue fairy. That's the positive element of nature. We could say, well, it's not so clear that nature's on your side. She's the Red Queen in *Alice in Wonderland*, who runs around screaming "off with their heads!" And who says, "in my kingdom, you have to run as fast as you can just to stay in the same place." That's mother nature. But then we might say, well, how do we know that mother nature's attitude towards you isn't negative, because your attitude towards things isn't proper? That's what this film attempts to indicate.

The idea is that, if you aim properly, then nature aligns itself behind you. It also arrays itself in front of you, perhaps even as an antagonist. But the power that it provides you with, from within, might be sufficient to overcome it from without. I think that the clinical evidence is clear about that. One of the things that we do know is that, if you take people who are confronting terrible things, and shrinking from them, and you teach them how to structure their behaviour so they can advance with courage, everything works better for them. Their fears decrease, and their character grows. And so there might be enough of nature within us to help us withstand the nature that's outside of us. It depends, at least to some degree, on how it is that we orient ourselves in the world.

Geppetto wants an autonomous individual as a son. That's also something that makes him a great person, because autonomous individuals have their own will. If you're a tyrant, it's the last thing that you're going to want. If you're the tyrant who's jealous of his son, it's even more so the last thing you're ever going to want. And so to aim, and to want the development of the autonomous individual, are the same thing. I would say that's the core story, in some sense, of Western culture: to aim high, and to develop the autonomous individual, are the same thing. That's what happens in *Pinocchio*. That's what happens in the story of Abraham. The magical transformation takes place. One of the things that's so interesting about the *Pinocchio* story—this is part of its mythological

substructure—is that, from the scientific perspective, there's only two determining forces with regards to the destiny of the individual: nature and culture, and both are deterministic. Scholars wrangle about which of those is the greater force. But, in mythological stories, there's always a third element. The third element is something like autonomous consciousness. There's no place for autonomous consciousness in the deterministic story of nature and culture, but we all act as if autonomous consciousness is the primary reality. The Biblical stories are predicated on the idea that autonomous consciousness is what gives rise to the world. I don't think that we're in a position to presume that that is necessarily an error. So what that means is to aim high, and to develop the autonomous individual, and, simultaneously, to formulate an allegiance with the conscious power that brings being into existence. That all takes place inside this little puppet. And then he has his adventures. He's still half jackass and half deceptive, but despite that, and despite all the errors, he has the capacity to move forward, and to transform himself into something that can be properly considered and described as a true son of God. That's the right aim. It works like this, as far as I can tell. When I had talked to people about doing the [Future Authoring Program](#), they often put it off. It's not surprising, because it's hard. But it's more than that: they think, well, I don't know how to write; I'm going to do a bad job; I don't really like assignments; I'm going to have to do it perfectly; I need to wait until I have enough time. One of those is enough to stop you cold, and all five of them—you're just done. I tell people, do it haphazardly, a tiny bit at a time, and badly, because you can do that. I tell my students, when they're doing their master's thesis, write a really bad first draft. And then we have a little conversation about that, because they don't think I mean that. It sounds like a cliché, in some sense. It's not a cliché, at all. You're a terrible writer, but if someone put a gun to your head, and said, "you have to have your 100 page thesis done by next Monday, or I'll shoot you, but I don't care how terrible it is," you would sit down and write it. The thing is, then you have it, right? Then you have something, and then you can fix it. You can iterate and fix it. That bad first draft, that's the most valuable thing. That's what you need: you need a bad first draft of yourself.

There's an idea that Jung developed about the trickster, or the jester, or the comedian. The trickster is the precursor to the saviour. That's one of the things I learned from Jung that was just so unlikely. You'd never think that. It's so amazing that that might be the case. The satirical and the ironic and the troublemaker, the comedian—the fool is the precursor to the saviour. Why? Because you're a fool when you start something new. And so, if you're not

willing to be a fool, then you'll never start anything new. And if you never start anything new, then you won't develop. And so the willingness to be a fool is the precursor to transformation. That's the same as humility. If you're going to write your destiny, you can do a bad first job. You're going to get smarter as you move forward.

Something beckons to you. That's what happens, here. Maybe the star that Geppetto wished on was the wrong damn star, but at least it was a star, right? At least it was in the sky. At least it moved him forward. And so you say in your life, well, something grips you, and fills you with interest. And you think, should I do that? The answer is, if not that, then something! What if it's a mistake? It's a mistake! Rest assured. What do you know? You're going to stumble around, right? And what's going to happen is this: you're going to not stay in stasis; you're not going to wander around in circles. I see people like that. They say, well, I never knew what to do, and now I'm 40. That's not so good. That's not so good, and there is a literature, too, that suggests that people are a lot more unhappy, when they look back on their lives, about the things they didn't do than they are about the mistakes they made while they were doing things. And so that's really worth thinking about, too.

There's redemptive mistakes. A redemptive mistake would be a mistake that you make when you go out and try to do something. You think, ok, I'm going to try to do this, and you're not good at it. You make a bunch of mistakes. What's the consequence, if you pay attention? You're not quite so stupid anymore. That's the thing: you've been informed by the results of your errors. What happens is you follow the beacon; you follow the light, and you're blind, so you don't know where the light is. It's dimly apprehended, only, and you're afraid to follow it. But you decide to take some stumbling steps towards it, and, as you take stumbling steps towards it, you become illuminated and enlightened and informed because of the nature of your experience, and because you're pushing yourself beyond where you are; you're going into the country that you have not yet been in. You learn something. What happens, then, is the star moves. You move 10 feet towards it, and you think, no, that's not right. I didn't get it right. It isn't there; it's actually there. So then you see it somewhere else, and you shift yourself slightly. You move forward.

You continue as you change. The thing that guides you forward moves. It's like God in the desert in Egypt. The pillar of light that you're following is moving. It's not a permanent thing. You move towards it, and it moves away. It guides you forward. So you say, is what I'm aiming at paradise itself? The answer to

that is no, because what do you know? You couldn't see paradise if it was right in front of you, but you might get a glimmer of it. And so you move towards it, and you grow. The next time you open your eyes, you see a little bit more clearly. That just happens over and over. It keeps moving, and so you move like this. But the thing that's so cool is that each of those zags and zigs is a catastrophe. I hit a wall, my God! And then I had to die a little bit, and I barely got back up. It's a phoenix transformation at each turn.

It's painful, but the thing is that, even though you travel 20 miles on that road, and you've only moved three miles forward, you've moved three miles forward, instead of moving backwards. That's the thing, too: if you stand still, you fall backwards. You cannot stand still, because the world moves away from you, if you stand still. There's no stasis; there's only backwards. And so, if you're not moving forwards, then you're moving backwards. Perhaps that's more of the underlying truth of the [Matthew principle](#): "to those who have everything, more will be given. From those who have nothing, everything will be taken." It's a warning: do not stay in one place.

Well, as you zig and zag, maybe the cataclysm of each transformation starts to lessen. There's not so much of you that has to die with every mistake. Maybe you end up oriented at least reasonably properly. If you were sensible, that would have been your trip. But it wasn't, right? It's that, and perhaps it's a lot worse than that. Perhaps there's no shortage of backtracking. But it doesn't matter, because as you stumble forward, you illuminate and inform yourself. Perhaps that's partly because the world is made of information. If you encounter it, and tangle with it, then it informs you, and then you become informed, and then you're in formation, and then you're ready. God says to Abraham, "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing." That's a good offer, fundamentally.

What does it mean to be made a great nation of? Well, perhaps it has something to do directly with your descendants, but I don't think it's just that. If you're a force for good in the world, and that radiates out from you, and if you're good enough, it's difficult to say how much of an impact on things you could have. Dostoevsky was a very crazy person, partly because of his epilepsy. He said, "a man is not only responsible for everything he does, but for everything everyone else does." And you think, well, no—and yes; sometimes no; sometimes that's what you think, if you're cataclysmically depressed: your sins are so egregious that they're unforgivable, and that, in some manner, you're at fault for

everything that's terrible with the world. But there's actually redemptive truth in that. Things wouldn't be so bad if you weren't so far from what you could be.

That's terribly pessimistic, because it's all on you, man. But it's terribly optimistic, because, God, there's a lot of things that you could do. And if you're crying out for something to do, then that's the best news that you could possibly have: Things aren't so good, but neither are you. If you stop doing the things that you knew to be destructive, which is the right place to start—if you're going to clean up your room, what do you do first? Well, you just get rid of the mess. No one has to come in and tell you, hopefully, what's the worst mess. It just announces itself to you. You can certainly know, yourself.

It's a very easy meditative exercise to sit down and think, ok, I'm doing one thing really stupidly that I should stop doing. It's like, how long is it going to take you to figure out what that is? It's about two seconds, right? You've known it forever. You could even make it less demanding. You could say, there's some stupid things that I'm doing, that I know are stupid and wrong, that I could stop doing, that I would stop doing. And then you can just start with that. You can just do that, and maybe it's just a little thing—although, it's not; it's a step forward on the proper voyage. It's not a small thing. You could do this for a year, or even a month: just try not to do things that you know to be stupid and wrong. That means not to say things that you know to be stupid and wrong, as well. Maybe that's the most important thing. Just do it as an experiment. See what happens.

It's so fun. I have people writing to me, from all over the world, who are saying they're doing that. They're saying, well, I cleaned up my room, then I stopped saying stupid things. My God! Things are way better. Who would have guessed it? It's low-hanging fruit, man. That's the other thing: if there's a lot of things wrong with you, it's really easy to start fixing it, you know? There's so much territory that you can inhabit.

"...I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee." That's good. I mean, the whole nation thing, that's positive. But to have God on your side... You might want that when things get rough. That would be good. "...And make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing." Wonderful. That's a good deal. "And I will bless them that bless thee"—that's good, too—"and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." That's something. Wouldn't it be something if you could wake up, and your day was composed, in part, of people thanking you for all the good things you've done in the world?

Wouldn't that be good? It's not impossible for that to happen.

"So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran." That's old. Abram lives a long time, but this is also part of the story. He has a wife who can't have children. He has nothing. Obviously, he's been hanging around dad's shack for a little too long, given that he's 75, right? It's time to get a little fire lit underneath him, a bit. He's not got much going for him, but he still decides to move forward.

I've seen this: if you don't have your destiny in hand by the time you're 30, it's rough. You start hurting. And if you don't have your destiny in hand by the time you're 40, then you really start hurting. Forty's a real fork in the road. A fork in the road is always where you meet the devil, by the way. That's because every time you have to make a decision, the possibility of evil beckons.

I had a friend—I told you a little bit about him. He killed himself just after 40. He had a book published with a very small press. He was quite a good writer, but he could not get himself together. It hit him too hard at 40. I'm not saying that it's hopeless at 40. I'm not saying that. I'm not saying that, partly because of these verses, and partly because of what I've seen in my clinical practice. I've had people come to me who have had very chaotic and ill-spent lives, let's say, who were in that neighbourhood of age—it's true for people who are older, as well—who then decided to make a real effort, and to try to make where they were better, instead of being bitter about where they weren't. That bitterness really does you in. It's really not good. It's the opposite of gratitude. It's the manifestation of resentment. It makes you malevolent. It's very, very bad to be bitter. It's hell to be bitter. If you're 40, and you're not successful, then you have to accept your lot, and you have to start to improve what's right in front of you. And if you do that, it doesn't take very long.

It's quite interesting to watch people. Things can be a lot better in six months, and they can be way better in two years. It's an uphill struggle, but it's by no means impossible. I don't know, again, what the limit of that is. I suppose it depends to some degree on the degree of your commitment. But, anyways, it's another indication of the real validity of this story. God isn't setting this up to be easy, right? Abraham's old, and his wife is old, too—more than that, she's barren. How's he going to be the father of nations? How is he going to be successful? Well, the initial departure point is radically insufficient. That's very inspiring because it means that you can start from where you are

inspiring, because it means that you can start from where you are.

"So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered..."

He has a relationship with Lot, right? He doesn't have his own son, but his brother died, and so he takes his nephew as his son. That's grateful. He could be very angry, and have nothing to do with him, because he didn't get his own son. But that isn't what happens. He's offered a substitute, let's say, and he accepts it, so good for him. That's also something, that I've seen, that's characterized people that can make the best of a bad lot: they don't get exactly what they want, but something comes along that offers possibilities that are sufficient, perhaps, if exploited properly. They open their heart, and welcome them in, instead of rejecting them in bitterness. That's a good thing, and that's part of Abraham's character.

"And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan"—into exile, let's say—"and into the land of Canaan they came." That's another repetition of the transformation story. You have to go to a land where you're not welcome. "And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord."

Now, we don't understand these rituals, precisely. I don't know if the people who did this engaged in a meditative ritual. Was that the idea, that you take something of value, you undertake this dramatic life and death transformation? Was that an aid to meditation? And what do you do? Do you sit down and think? Do you pray? Pray being to ask: What do I do next? How do I orient myself in the world? It's a useful exercise, to do that. I think it's something that people could do every morning. I think it's useful to sit down, and think, ok, what's the most important thing I should do today? I have an array of things that call to me to be done, some of which I will do with joy, and some of which I will bear as

responsibilities. But they array themselves in front of me. What should I attend to first? Well, do you ask, or do you decide?

It seems to me, when I do it—because I do it all the time; I do it every morning. I try to sit down, and think, ok, I've got things that I would like to do, and things that call to me out of necessity. What do I do first? It's not so much a decision as it is a question. I don't know what I'm calling on—I'm calling on my capacity to think, I suppose. But that's not my capacity, exactly. I can commune with whatever provides answers, and I can think that that's me thinking, but...It isn't that I believe that I can't think. I do believe that I can consciously think, but that's not the same as calling for inspiration. It's not the same process, just like a dream is not conscious thinking: it's something that happens to you. That kind of inspiration is also something that happens to you.

I ask myself, what's the most important thing I could do next? And then I have an answer to that. It isn't because I decided that I'll do it, whatever it is, and that I want to know what it is. Those are the decisions. But there's an involuntary aspect to the sorting that occurs. That's the psychological equivalent, I suppose, to this. I guess the sacrifice is, when I feel that I will do whatever it is that calls to be done, then I don't do the other things that I might want to do. That's a sacrifice. To me, it's the proper sacrifice, because my sense is that things don't go properly unless you do what's most important. And if I want things to go properly—and I do, because I've had my taste of things not going properly—it's not so difficult to do what makes things go properly, under those circumstances.

I think this is partly why the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is embedded in the Abrahamic stories. That's an apocalyptic story: if things go badly enough, the whole city is destroyed. The reason it goes badly is because the people in the city do not behave properly. The people in the city might be you. So if you're not behaving properly, then you go, and so does the city, and maybe you want that, or maybe you don't want that. And if you don't want that, and you know that if you don't do things properly then it's you and the city—if you actually know that—then maybe that terrifies you badly enough so that you're willing to make the sacrifice to do the right things, instead of the impulsive things that you might otherwise do.

I learned from [Viktor Frankl](#), [Carl Jung](#), [Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn](#), and from reading the works of many people who wrote on the holocaust and the catastrophes in the Soviet Union. The people who studied it most deeply always



came to the same conclusion: the state became corrupted because each individual allowed themselves to be corrupted, or perhaps participated joyfully in the process of being corrupted. The consequence of that was the end of the world. So what that means is that, if you don't behave properly, then you bring about the end of the world. Maybe you think, well, that's only the end of your world. Fair enough. Or maybe it's only the end of your family's world, which, I suppose, might give you some pause. But there's more to it than that, because you're connected to everyone else, and what you do that isn't good distributes itself, and all the things that you don't do that could be good take away from the whole. And so, if you know that—and I do think you know that, if you take it seriously. If you look at the historical, cataclysmic events of the 20th century seriously, I do not think that you can fail to come to that conclusion.

"And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south." That's interesting, because to go south means to go down downhill. It's not good, to go south. It's colloquial for going to where you shouldn't go. And so this is what happens to Abraham: his ascent is preceded by a descent. That's very common in life, I would say. The redemptive element of this narrative is that, if the covenant is constructed properly—so it's an ark, which is your decision to align yourself with God, for all intents and purpose—then even the journey south can be part of a broader journey upward.

"And there was a famine in the land..." That's mother nature failing to cooperate. I mean, that's gotta be pretty disheartening for Abraham, don't you think? He finally gets it together, when he's 75, to leave, because God says, get going, and the first place he goes, everyone's starving to death. It's like, you know, you might think about that as a test of faith, wouldn't you say? But he keeps going. And then what happens? Well, he has to go to Egypt. So great; he goes where everyone's starving, and then, to get away from where everyone's starving, he goes to a tyranny. So the whole beginning of the story's not particularly auspicious.

"And Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land." It's a repetition of the same idea, again, of a downhill voyage into chaos. It's repeated over and over, that the beginning of Abraham's journey is basically a sequence of experiences of exile, chaos, tyranny, and catastrophe.

You should be able to relate to that. You know how hard it is to get things together, you know? You go out to do what you're supposed to do, say, and you're beset by the intransigence of the world and failure. So what are you

you're beset by the malignance of the world and future. So what are you supposed to do about that? Maintain your faith in the good, and continue to move forward. That's the idea. Even if you don't buy the metaphor, what are you going to do instead, that won't make it worse? So even if it isn't enough that you're pursuing, you're at least forestalling the transformation of the chaos of your life into sheer hell. That can certainly happen. You see people who are having a terrible time, and then you see people who are having a terrible time, and who are also in hell. It's a lot better to just have a terrible time than to have a terrible time and be in hell at the same time.

"And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive."

Abram is really having a rough time. He's a failure. He's wandering around through the land of starvation, and now he's going to go be a quasi-slave in Egypt. He has this incredibly attractive wife, and all he can look forward to is the fact that the most successful man in Egypt, the Pharaoh, will take her from him. So he's got the whole embitterment thing nailed down, as far as I can tell. And this is when he makes one of his errors, let's say, and one of the errors that humanizes him.

"Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee. And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels."

So, actually, things work out pretty well for Abram, despite his deceit, which is quite interesting. I guess it's because, if the overarching structure is solid—something like that—then errors can still be forgiven, to speak about it from a metaphorical perspective.

"And the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife."

Well, it doesn't seem very fair, because the Pharaoh didn't know. But it's not the

right way to look at it. The right way to look at it—there's a story later in the Bible about David. David could be a pretty bad guy. When he becomes king, he's in his castle, and he's looking over the city, and he sees a woman sunbathing nude, on a roof, out on the city. He's smitten by her—floored by her. He has inquiries made about who she is. Her name is [Bathsheba](#), and he finds out who her husband is. Her husband actually happens to be a general in his army. He arranged for that general to be put at the thick of the battle and killed. And then he takes Bathsheba.

The Lord is not pleased by that, let's put it that way. That's interesting. It's an interesting story because you might say, well, why can't the king do whatever the hell he wants? Seriously; he's the king. He's not just like the Prime Minister or the President. He's the king. So you might say, well, why is the king subject to any rules, whatsoever? What's the rationale for the king being subject to rules? Well, the rationale emerges in these stories. There are social strictures that are such that, even if the ruler of the land transgresses against them, there will be hell to pay. That's continually presented, over and over, in the Biblical stories. It's a natural law sort of idea.

There are intrinsic rules to the game of social human being, and maybe intrinsic rules to the natural state of human being. You break those rules consciously or unconsciously at your absolute peril—and not only at your peril, but at the peril of the state. It doesn't matter who you are. I would say this is actually an indication of God being fair, rather than being unfair. Because the rule is, Pharaoh or not, you don't get to take someone else's wife, and ignorance is no excuse. You might say that's a little bit harsh—and perhaps it is a little bit harsh—but the idea is not without merit. Of course, Abram is complicit in this. Despite that, he is successful.

"And Pharaoh called Abram and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way. And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had. "And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold."

It's interesting: Abraham goes to the place of famine, and then he goes to the place of tyranny, and then he lies, and then he almost loses his wife, but because he does things work out for him. So hooray for that

he goes, things work out for him. So happy for that.

"And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; Unto the place of the altar"—so he makes another sacrifice—"which he had make there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord."

So he's had an adventure, right? He's finished his journey. There's a culminating point in this narrative, and now he doesn't know what to do. He's left the place he's at; he doesn't know what to do, so it's time to build an altar, make a sacrifice, and ask for divine guidance, once again. He's been there, done that. What's next? The question is asked seriously, and this is something to consider: if you want to know what to do, ask seriously.

Abraham sacrifices a life to his vow. So what do you do? Well, you don't sacrifice an animal. You don't make a blood sacrifice; you do it psychologically. You say, I'm going to sacrifice my life to this aim. That's what you do, if you're serious. What do I do next? Well, I'm going to sacrifice my life to this aim. What is it that I should do that's worth sacrificing my life to? That's a serious question. Maybe that's the sort of question that people don't ask, because they're afraid of the seriousness of the question and the potential magnitude of the answer. Do you really want to know what you should do that would be worth sacrificing your life to? Well, the answer is yes, because it's worth it. But the answer is also no, because it's your life, you know? What if you're wrong? And you're probably wrong. But maybe that doesn't matter. Maybe the rightness is in the process, and not in the decision. It's the beginning of a sequence of decisions, as we've already pointed out.

"...place of the altar, which he had make there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord. And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land."

That's interesting, too. Abram's having a pretty good time of it, now. He's out of starvation—hey, that's good—he's out of the tyranny, and now he's kind of wealthy. And then the story flips on him: he's wealthy, and now a bad thing happens to him. He's got all this wealth, and so does his nephew, and now they can't get along, because they have too much stuff. That's quite comical, as well.

can't get along, because they have too much stuff. That's quite comical, as well. I think that's a comic interlude, here. Now, they handle it properly.

"And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."

So basically, they sit down and say, well, one of us has got to get out of town. It can be one or the other; it doesn't really matter. We can flip a coin, but we have to separate. They do it amicably.

"And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where"—so that's an intimation of Eden, right, because Eden means well-watered place—"before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar."

It's so interesting. You get foreshadowing here, again. Lot and Abram are making their decision about where to go, and Lot looks out and sees a reasonable place. But then this warning comes up that there's a city out there where things are not going to go well. Things are being done badly, and things are not going to go well.

"Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly."

Now, the word sin—I mentioned this to you before—is an interesting word. It's the derivation of an archery term, in my understanding of its derivation. The Greek word was [hamartia](#), and hamartia is an archery term that means to miss the bullseye. It's worth thinking about that metaphorically, because you got to think about all the ways you can miss the bullseye. You can close your eyes; that's very common. You could just not lift up the damn bow and arrow to begin with. You could face the wrong way. You could be unskilled in your aim. I also like the archery metaphor because human beings are built on a hunting platform. We always aim at things—we're ballistic creatures on a trajectory, always.

We're always at something. We're always aiming at the mark, which is, of course, what you do when you hunt. You have to hit the mark precisely. That's what we're like psychologically. We have to aim at something and then move towards it. And so to sin is to miss the mark, to miss the bullseye, to fail to take aim, to aim badly, to aim carelessly, or to not aim at all. That's like a sin of omission, that's to not do, and then to be wicked is to aim at what you know you shouldn't aim at.

Again, I don't think of that as an external morality, precisely. I think that you can read the entire Biblical narrative from a psychological perspective. We're not talking about external codes of conduct, here—although we could. The wickedness that's being described is the act of you doing something that you know to be wrong, period. You may do something, and you don't know if it's wrong or not. That isn't the sort of thing that we're talking about. And we're not talking about the things that you do, that are right, that other people think are wrong. We're not talking about those, either. We're talking about those things that you consciously do although you know them to be wrong yourself. Those are the things that seem to get people into the most trouble in these stories. I believe that to be the case. I think that's very accurate, psychologically.

It's amazing. I see this all the time: If you do something wrong, and it's because you're ignorant, you don't know better, it doesn't go well for you. That's the case. But if you do something wrong, and you know it's wrong, the punishment is manifold. I think the reason for that is because that makes you Cain. It means you betray your own ideal. If you just don't know, well, you haven't betrayed your ideal; you're just not together. Maybe you're even wilfully blind. But if you do something that you know to be wrong, then you've betrayed your own ideal. Then that lands you—once Cain destroyed Abel, Cain said to God, "I cannot bear my punishment."

"And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee."

So a cathedral is a cross, and the transformation takes place at the crux of the cross which is exactly right: the transformation takes place at the point of

cross, which is exactly right. the transformation takes place at the point of maximal suffering. The cathedral's designed to indicate that symbolically. What happens in a religious ceremony is also a journey. It's a journey, in some sense, to the holy city. And then that's also played out in the idea of pilgrimage, because you actually go to a holy city—Jerusalem, or wherever it is that you think the holy city is. You go there, and that takes you out of your country, away from your kin, away from your family, into a strange land. As you make the journey, you transform, and when you come back, you're not the same. That's the story of *The Hobbit*, right?

But let's say you can't afford to go on a pilgrimage, so you go the cathedral, and there's a huge maze on the ground. It's the world: north, south, west, and east, just as God describes, here. It's laid out. You enter the maze at one side, and in the middle is a stone pattern that looks like a flower. It's the place where being wells forth, and it's at the center of the cathedral. What that means is that, if you accept your suffering, then you move to the place where the spirit of being wells forth. That's what that means. You enter the maze, and you walk, and it's divided into quadrants. You walk one quadrant completely, and then the maze pathway takes you into the next quadrant, and then you walk that completely, and then it takes you to the third one, and the fourth one, and then, when you walk the maze completely, everywhere, when you've gone everywhere in the world, north, south, east, and west, when you've traversed the territory completely, then you come to the center, and then it's yours.

When I've been renovating houses—I like to do that—I've paid a lot of attention to the psychological process of the house renovation. Jung said this—this is something, man. He was talking about the stages of psychological integration. He looked beyond [Piaget](#), I would say. Although, Piaget looked very far. He said, here's a conjunction: you have to get your rationality and your emotion together. That's a male-female conjunction, symbolically speaking: male rationality, female emotionality. You want to bring those together so that they are oriented in the same direction; your emotions and your rationality serve the same purpose. So then you're unified in mind and spirit, let's say. That's not good enough. Once you've got that together, then you have a body, and then that's a male-female conjunction, again—a divine conjunction, and the recreation of Adam before his division into female and male, and the reconstruction of the androgynous Christ. All those ideas are linked together.

So now you have your emotion and your rationality moving in the same direction, but you're not acting it out. Now you have to unite that abstract part of

you with your body, and start acting out what you think and feel. That's the next conjunction, but it's not the last one. The last conjunction is when you realize that there's no distinction between you and your experience. They're the same thing. So then, when you put together your house, you're putting together yourself.

I've noticed, when I've lived in places—rented or owned, it didn't matter—if there was a part of the place that I hadn't attended to, whatever that might be—it might have meant clean, it might have meant fix, but it meant, at least, thoroughly investigated—then that meant chaos. It was like the desert, that part. That's a way of thinking about it. It wasn't mine, even if I owned it. I had to interact with it before it became mine, and I had to interact with it, and I had to put it in order, and then it became mine. To the degree that it became mine and was in order, then I was also put in order. You know that because you go into places that make you uncomfortable, and maybe it's your own house. It's highly probable.

Traditional Chinese doctors go into places and diagnose a person's house conditions on the balance of yin and yang, chaos and order. You walk into a house—this is easy to do—and, hey, there's too much chaos. You can detect that in no time flat. Everything is out of order and chaotic. You don't even want to be there. You certainly don't want to open the refrigerator. That's for sure. There are things that should have been done years ago, everywhere. And every one of those things is a fight that hasn't happened, and something that's been avoided. You can't even walk in there and maintain your health. As soon as you walk in there, you're sicker than you were when you were outside. That's one sort of place.

Another sort of place is, you go in and look at the living room, and the person has vacuumed the living room rug. The lines that were vacuumed are parallel to one another, and the furniture's covered in plastic. You get a glass of water, and just as you're going to set it down on the coffee table, the person rushes over and puts a coaster underneath it. Everything in that house says to you that it would be a lot more perfect in that house if you were either not there or dead. That's the message that the whole house is blasting at you. If you happen to live there, then you're going to be sick. What you're going to be sick from is too much order. And in the other house, you're going to be sick from too much chaos. And so when you interact with a house, the unexplored parts, that you have not yet contended with, are the chaos that has not yet been transformed by your embodied logos—action into habitable territory—and it does not belong to you.



enclosed region – taken into habitable territory – and it does not belong to you.

"Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord. And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations; That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar. All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea."

Now, this is actually very much relevant. "The vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea" is the farthest south you can go, if south is down, because it's the [Dead Sea](#), and the Dead Sea is the lowest place that there is. So what's happened is that there's chaos in the lowest place that there is. That's what this story says. What happens to Lot is that he gets tangled up in the chaos of the lowest place that there is.

"And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaims in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzims in Ham, and the Emins in Shaveh Kiriathaim, And the Horites in their mount Seir, unto Elparan, which is by the wilderness. "And they returned, and came to Enmishpat, which is Kadesh, and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, that dwelt in Hazezontamar. And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar;) and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim." So this is absolute chaos and mayhem in the lowest place. It's hell, essentially. "With Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and with Tidal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings with five. And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits." Low and hell-like, with war, isn't enough; they had to throw the slimepits in there. Apparently, around the Dead Sea, there are pits of bitumen, like the tar pits near L.A. This actually seems to be historically accurate. "And the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain. And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way." "And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed." So Abram has a family member who falls into the lowest place. "And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram. And when Abram heard that his brother was

taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan."

So now we know that Abram's a pretty brave guy, right? He gets word that this horrible war has broken out in the worst of all possible places, and that his nephew is involved. The first thing he does is mount up his posse, get the hell in there, and rescue his nephew. Whatever goodness is from the Old Testament perspective, it isn't harmlessness. It isn't emasculation and castration. It's not that; it's not weakness. It's not the inability to fight. None of that is associated with virtue. It's a sort of strength that enables someone to mount and arm a team of 300 people when he finds out that his nephew has been kidnapped in a terrible war, and to get the hell out there and take him back. That's a call to power, not a kind of peaceful meekness.

It's funny, too, because there's a line in the New Testament: "the meek shall inherit the earth." It's in the Sermon on the Mount. That line always bothered me. I thought, no way; that's not right; meek can't be the right word. So when I was doing the story of Noah, and talking about the Sermon on the Mount, I spent a bunch of time looking at commentaries on that line—looking at the Greek roots, and the Hebrew roots, and trying to figure out what that meant. Meek does not mean meek. That's wrong. Here's what it means: those who have weapons and know how to use them, but still keep them sheathed, will inherit the earth. Jesus—that's a lot different, man. It's a lot better, right? The way it's normally interpreted is, if you're so weak that you're harmless, then things will go well for you. It's like, no. That's not right. That can't be right. It doesn't fit with the narrative. It certainly doesn't fit with this narrative.

"And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people." Good work, Abraham. "And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale. And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all. "And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself." Those are the goods that Abram rescued. of the kings. "And Abram said to the king of Sodom. I have lift

up mine hand unto the Lord"—what does that mean? It means I made a vow; that's what that phrase means—"the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich: Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion."

Abraham's made this immense sacrifice, done this incredibly brave act, rescued his nephew, and rescued the king's goods. They offer him a reward, and he says, I'm not going to take the reward. The reason for that is that he doesn't want to contaminate the ethical purity of his actions. He doesn't want to...What is it, exactly? He doesn't want to benefit inappropriately from doing the right thing. It's something like that. And so it's another testament to his character, and a very complex testament, because he's not a good man in any simple sense. I mean, look at what just happened: he's led an army into battle and participated in slaughter. He refuses to benefit from it, except to get back what was his—that's it: he refuses to benefit from it except to get back what was rightfully his, and that way he maintains his covenant with God.

"Even to a shoelatchet, *i.e.* any thing, though never so small or mean, lest thou shouldst claim a share with God in the honour due to him"—this is from [Matthew Poole](#), who is an English non-conformist theologian, commenting on that line—"to whose blessing alone I do and I will owe my riches. Or, lest thou shouldst say, Abram is enriched with my spoils; and however he pretended kindness and charity, yet indeed it was his covetousness that put him upon this work. "After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." The vision issue, again...Well, we went through that last week. "...Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless"—that's the only thing that matters to Abraham at this point—"and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?" No kin. "And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." So he gets promised the impossible, once again. "And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

This is the covenant idea. Here's the belief: it's the willingness to act as if the world is constructed so that, if you do the right thing, the best possible outcome will occur. It's a decision; that's the covenant. It's a decision about how to live in the world. The evidence can't be there before you make the decision, and so you might hedge your bets.

When Christ comes back in the Book of Revelation to judge people, virtually everyone gets cast out with the chaff, and not saved with the wheat. He says something very interesting. He appears in the vision with a sword coming out of his mouth. It's a horrifying vision. He divides humanity into the damned and the saved. He says something very interesting. He says, "to those who are neither hot nor cold, I will spew you out of my mouth." It's a disgust metaphor, right? What it says is that the worst punishment isn't waiting for those who committed to something and did wrong: the worst punishment is reserved for those who committed to nothing and stayed on the fence.

That's really something to think about. It's also something I believe to be true, because I see that stasis is utterly destructive. There's no progress; movement backwards is all there is. There's aging, suffering, and no progress. And so to not commit to anything is the worst of all transgressions. To commit means to put your body and soul into something. To offer your life as a sacrifice means that you're willing to make a bargain with fate. The bargain is, I'm going to act as if, if I give it my all, then the best possible thing will happen because of that. And to not see the analogy between that and the active faith in God is to misunderstand the story completely. And it has to be an act of faith, because how are you going to know? You can look at other people, but that isn't going to do it.

[Kierkegaard](#) was very clear about this sort of thing. There are certain sorts of truths that you can only learn for yourself through experience. That's, of course, why Abram also has to go out alone, right? It's the individuation process—like dying, it's something that you do alone. There's no way you can tell what's within your grasp, let's say, unless you make the ultimate sacrifice. And there's no way of finding out without actually making it. And so that's the sacrificial act. That's reemphasized in the act of Abram being called upon to sacrifice Isaac. Think about that! It's Abram; he's been breaking himself into pieces trying to progress forward through starvation, tyranny, war, deceit, the potential loss of his wife, childlessness, and everything that can really befall you, in some sense. Finally, God grants him Isaac, when he's old. It's impossible. He gets

Isaac, his son. Then what does God do, next? He says, well, you know that son that you've been waiting for, for so long? I'd like to see just exactly what you're made of, so I think you should offer him up as a sacrifice. It's a very barbaric story, in a sense—and maybe in more than just a sense. But Abraham does maintain his covenant. He's willing to make the sacrifice. This is the thing: he's willing to make whatever sacrifice is necessary to keep his covenant with God intact, and that's that, and that's the decision. Well, maybe it's no surprise that people don't do that.

"And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness. And he said unto him, I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? "And he said unto him"—this is a sacrificial story, again—"Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." It's fairly specific, actually. "And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not." There's a reason for that, and I don't know the reason for it. "And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him."

That didn't mean he was afraid of the dark, which is what I thought it meant, when I first read it. It isn't what it means. It means that he fell into a trance, or something like that, and then he was enveloped by absolute horror. That's how this story begins.

Here's the commentary of [Joseph Benson](#), who's an English Methodist Minister, who was born in 1749: "And when the sun was going down—about the time of the evening oblation"—washing—"for, he abode by them, praying and waiting till toward evening; a deep sleep fell upon Abram—not a common sleep through weariness or carelessness, but a divine ecstasy, that, being wholly taken off from things sensible, he might be wholly taken up with the contemplation of things spiritual." It really makes you wonder what Abraham was up to in his campsite. He was participating in something that enabled this experience. "And lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him—this was designed to strike an awe upon the spirit of Abram, and to possess him with a holy reverence. Holy fear prepares the soul for holy joy; God humbles first, and then lifts up." Echoes of psychedelic experience. "And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a

stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." The commentaries of Joseph Benson, once again: "They shall come hither again—hither to the land of Canaan, wherein thou now art. The reason why they must not have the land of promise in possession till the fourth generation, is, because 'the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full.' The righteous God has determined that they shall not be cut off till they are arrived to such a pitch of wickedness; and therefore, till it come to that, the seed of Abram must be kept out of possession."

So the interpretation of the story, essentially, is that Abraham's descendants will end up enslaved in Egypt for a lengthy period of time and eventually come back to the land of Canaan. It's interesting, too, because this is part of Abram's bargain of God, and in this divine vision. He's been promised everything, but it's a pretty tough bargain. When God is pushed or reveals himself, let's say, he says, look, you're going to get your damn descendants, but it's going to be a tough journey. They're going to be enslaved for a very long time and eventually come back—and you won't see it; you'll be dead long before then. It's a realistic promise, in a sense. And you might say, well, Abram is so desperate to keep the faith that he's willing to read good into what isn't good. I don't think that's the right way to look at it. I think the right way to look at it is that, the people who wrote these stories were very realistic, and they knew, even if things turned out well for you, it was still going to be real. It wasn't going to be some fantasy. Let's say you have a family that flourishes—people are still going to die; they're still going to get sick; they're still going to be alive, with all of its suffering. But it'll be a life that's rich enough and complete enough so that it will justify its nature, essentially.

"And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces." [Albert Barnes](#), American theologian, commented on this: "The oven of smoke and lamp of flame symbolize the smoke of destruction and the light of salvation. Their passing through the pieces of the victims and probably consuming them as an accepted sacrifice are the ratification of the covenant on the part of God, as the dividing and presenting of them were on the part of Abram." "In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this

land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites..." et cetera.

I think we'll stop there. I'm tiring out, and it's 9:29, so that's a very good place to stop. I should close properly and just sum up. So what happens, here, is that Abram enters into a covenant with God to act in the world. The action is an adventure story, essentially. The adventures repeat, and they're punctuated by success and sacrifice and re-contemplation. It's the hero's journey uphill: I'm here; there's a crisis; I collapse; I reconstruct myself to a higher place. Life is like that, continually, and that's the story of Abraham. This is what's so cool: that is what your life is going to be like. Whether you plan out your life or not, it's going to be punctuated like that. Maybe it won't go up; maybe it'll go down. The question is, what sort of container do you need to be in, in order to tolerate the movement up and down? That's what the story of Abraham provides: it provides a description of the covenant. The covenant and the ark are the same thing, except the covenant is the psychological equivalent of the ark. The covenant is, have faith in the structure of existence and go forth. That's the covenant. The story is, that's the best possible solution that you have at hand.



## **X: Abraham: Father of Nations**

Hello everyone. It's been a very strange day. I'm going to tell you about what happened, and then I'll start the lecture. I got up this morning and started to put my day together, and I tried to sign in to my Gmail account. It said that it had been disabled because I violated the terms of service with Gmail. I thought, 'well, I didn't violate any terms of service that I know of.' I set up a new YouTube channel yesterday, called [Jordan B Peterson Clips](#). We made some technical changes, and so I thought maybe it had something to do with that. And I had been shut out of Google one other time, years ago.

When you get shut out like that, there's a little form you can fill out. So I filled out the form, and I said I had been shut out, and that I didn't know why, and I sent it off. And then I realized that one of my staff members had called me and said that she was locked out of the YouTube account. I thought, 'oh, yeah! The YouTube account is hooked to the Gmail account.' That meant that I couldn't get access to any of my YouTube videos. They were still up and online, but I couldn't get access to them. I couldn't post last week's Biblical lecture, for example. That was worrisome, and made me suspicious. And then, about two hours later, I got an email from Google. They said that they had reviewed my request to be reinstated, and that I had violated Google's terms of service, and that they weren't going to turn my account back on. They didn't say why; they didn't say anything. There was no warning, whatsoever, about any of this. They didn't tell me why, and they didn't say why in the email response. And so I wrote them back—because they said I could—and I said, 'this might not be a good idea,' basically, 'and you might want to think about it.' And then I tweeted what had happened. I took screenshots, and I tweeted, and I contacted a whole bunch of journalists, because it turns out that I know a whole bunch of journalists.

What happened, then, was that I got a call from The Daily Caller in the United States. I had done an interview with them last week, which isn't posted yet. They interviewed me, and, within 20 minutes, had posted it online. They have a fairly big audience, and so that was good. And then somebody phoned me from Ottawa, and I did a live radio show. That was good. And then a number of other journalists contacted me, and I sent them the information. But another one of my staff members, my son, emailed me and said, 'look, you should hold off, because maybe there's still a mistake.' I thought, 'yeah, it might be just a mistake. But



then why in the world did I email Google, and they contacted me and said they would not reinstate it, and didn't provide me with any information?'

I contacted the other journalists, and I said, 'maybe this is just a mistake, so let's hold off.' And then, about half an hour later, while I was trying—I use this AdWords account that's linked to Google. I don't run ads on my videos, but I need the AdWords account because it helps me add some little gadgets to the videos that I wouldn't otherwise be able to. I was always playing with that. The system came back online. I thought, 'well, that's interesting.' Lots of people had emailed and twittered me. Some of the people were from within Google, and some people elsewhere, and they were doing whatever they were going to do to help me get all this material back up and running, and so something worked. My suspicions are that what worked was the publicity. But maybe not, you know?

Being in this situation is very weird. There has been a number of recent episodes where these larger companies—Facebook, Google, Patreon...Not that Patreon is a massive company, but it's starting to become reasonably significant—have decided, on rather arbitrary grounds, to shut down their users. This is very ominous, partly because we've turned our communications over to very large systems, or very large systems have emerged to mediate our communication. There's lots of benefit to it, so you don't want to get too cynical about it. But we're blind with regards to the policies that regulate the regulatory actions of these large organizations. That's really a bad thing. Something else, that's even more ominous, is that it's highly probable that we're going to build political algorithms into our artificial intelligence. This sort of thing will be regulated by machines that no one understands. That's a really bad idea, and that's a really likely possibility.

So anyways, I was all confused about this. I thought, 'Jesus, maybe I flew off the handle,' you know? It was stressful, man. I have like 150,000 emails in that account. That's a lot of emails. It's all my correspondence for the last 10 years, so it's an archive as well as an ongoing email system. I have a commercial email system that I just set up three weeks ago, with like six different email addresses, now, to try to organize my correspondence, so I wasn't completely unable to communicate. But my calendar was gone, and that's a bloody disaster, because I've got things scheduled out forever, and I don't remember what they are. I can't even remember what I'm doing in a day, much less in a month. But I thought maybe I'd flew off the handle, and I'd worried that I'd contacted journalists too soon. But, anyways, it all worked out.

Then what happened, just as I was coming to this lecture, I stepped outside, and there was a little package. Luckily, it wasn't a bomb. My wife and I looked inside it, and there was a couple of bottles of wine in there, so that was nice, and there was a little note. I'm going to read you the little note, because it's actually pretty interesting. This person said that they had finally tackled the [Self Authoring Suite](#), so they seemed to be happy about that, but that's not so interesting, except peripherally.

"A friend on Twitter has contact with Google engineers. She said, 'I spoke with some friends inside Google, who offered to help.'" I did get contacted by quite a few people at Google, who said that they had been watching my lectures, and so on, and were happy about what I was doing. "'I spoke with some friends inside Google, who offered to help. But they suggested he set up a backup plan. The teams are feeling significant pressure from advocacy groups," and, quote, "'I have at least four Google engineers who offered to speak up on his behalf. But they know the team dynamics, and, unfortunately, especially YouTube, is an SJW cesspool. I hope this information is useful to you.'" It's like, yeah, it's kind of useful, all right.

So that was part of what happened today. I still don't really understand it, because I don't know why it got shut down, and I don't know if anything I did got it turned back on, and I don't know the reasons for it. That's also rather ominous. It seems to me that, when I was thinking it through, I have a fairly... what would you call it...respectable YouTube following. I don't know if you'd necessarily call it respectable. It's a fairly large YouTube following. It seems to me that it would have been appropriate for Google, if they were going to shut down my account, to tell me why—I would think—and also look me up, especially after I emailed them, and then maybe not to have emailed me back and said, 'no, we're not going to reinstate you, but we're not going to tell you any reasons.' They didn't say they weren't going to tell me any reasons; they just didn't tell me any reasons. And then it also seems very strange to me that it just all of a sudden went back on, after two hours.

I don't know what to make of that. Maybe more information will come to light over the next few days. I hope that I didn't jump the gun, but it's a very peculiar set of circumstances. I thought it was kind of amusing, actually, that the video that they stopped me from posting today was the last Biblical lecture. You wouldn't necessarily think that that would be the sort of thing that people would want to stop from being posted. But we're in very, very strange times. So that was my adventure for today.

was my adventure for today.

I hate speakers who apologize to the crowd before talking to them, because, if you're speaking to people, and they put all this effort into coming, then you shouldn't tell them what a sorry and useless creature you are before you talk to them, and ask for their forbearance and forgiveness. You're a little late for that, but I'm still going to do that a little bit today. I wanted to spend all day preparing this lecture—I mean, I've prepared it a lot beforehand, but that rattled me up a lot, and so I didn't prepare as much as I could have. Anyways, we'll stumble forward, and see how it goes. I'm reasonably familiar with the stories, now. Onward and upward.

So I'm going to reiterate this. I've learned something...I have this idea that it would be a good idea for young people, and older people—citizens of the West, let's say—to learn more about their culture and their civilization, because it's a great civilization. It's taken a lot of work to put together. I know a fair bit about it, but I wouldn't consider myself nearly as educated as a person should be. But I'm not too badly educated. But I tell you, going through these Biblical lectures, verse by verse, just makes me even more aware of how unbelievably ignorant I am, for two reasons: One is because I've been using this [BibleHub.com](http://BibleHub.com) place—I think I told you last week, but I want to reiterate it, because it's important. The way they've set it up is so interesting. You can go through the Biblical stories, verse by verse. For each verse, there's a whole small font page of commentary, from multiple sources. Not only is the Bible a hyperlink in the way that I discussed in the first lecture, with all the verses referring to not all the other verses, but lots of them, but it's got its tendrils out into literature, direct commentaries on the text, and all the literature that's been influenced by it. It's an unbelievably central and core text. It's so interesting to read a book where every sentence has been commented on, well, really, in volumes. And then to just get a sense of that volume of material, how much brain power has been put into this....I'm so ignorant about this. There's all this work, and it seems that we've left it to decay in the dust, and it's a big mistake, man. It's a big mistake, because the people who were writing these commentaries...A lot of it's from the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries. It's kinda archaic, and some of it's outdated, and some of it you wouldn't agree with, but, if you read all the commentaries side by side, you get a pretty good blast of wisdom coming at you. The thing about wisdom is it stops you from running face-first into walls. It's not just there so that you can talk to people at parties about what university you graduated from. It's there because the information is unbelievably useful.

One of the things that I realized, that I want to return to tonight, that I've been thinking a lot about, is this idea of the ark. I think I mentioned to you last week that I figured out that there is this idea that Noah was perfect in this generations, and that meant that he had set his family in order; it wasn't just him, but he had set his family in order, and, because of that, when the catastrophe came—like it comes to everyone—he was able to withstand it, because he had the support of the people who were near and dear to him. That's really important when things come along to lay you low. If you're alone, and the flood comes...Man, goodbye to you. If you've got 10 or 15 people supporting you in a tight network, and your interrelationships with them are pristine, and you can tell them the truth, and they can tell the truth back to you, it's possible that you might be able to find a way that will preserve you, when the terrible things come knocking at your door.

The idea of the ark is very, very concrete in Noah. It's actually a structure that he inhabits. It's almost like a child's story. I'm not being cynical about that. There are some bloody brilliant children's stories. It's really concretized, but then Abraham comes along. Instead of an ark, there's a covenant, right? It says in the story of Noah that Noah walked with God. Of course, it isn't clearly, exactly, if he's walking with God, or before God, which we'll get into later. I see this as part of the increasing psychologization of the sacred ideas that were acted out by archaic people. First of all, it's concretized in the form of a ship that actually sustains you when the floods come. It's very concrete imagery; the type of thing you might see in a movie. But then, with Abraham, it turns into a psychological covenant, in some sense. It's like a contractual agreement. It's a contractual agreement between Abraham and God, but that doesn't really matter... Obviously, it matters, but it's only half of what's important about that. The other half is that it's a contract.

One of the things that you do with your ideal, let's say, is that you establish a contract with it. You also establish a social contract with other people, right? That's what keeps society organized. There's this idea, that emerges in the Abraham stories, of a sacred contract, and that has the same function as the ark. God tells Abraham to go forward into the world. We talked about that last week. He does that. He encounters famine, tyranny, and powerful people who want to take from him what's his. God sends him out in the world, but it's not like he has an easy ride of it. It isn't easy, at all. It's as hard as it can be. But there's this consistent emphasis in the text—and I think it's something really worth attending to—that, if you maintain your contract, and that has to do with honesty, trust, truth, and all of those things, then you have the best possible possibility of making your way through the catastrophe and the chaos.

possibility of making your way through the catastrophe and the chaos.

I don't want to be naive about this. When I read Jung, and I started to understand the idea of the hero archetype—you know, the idea that the human being is a logos force that can stand up against chaos, catastrophe, tragedy, and evil, and prevail...I never did think that's what it meant, that, if you did stand up, and tell the truth, that you would necessarily prevail. It's not a magic trick. It's your best bet. That's the thing: you don't have a better option.

The idea's emerging in the Abrahamic texts. It's like, people are figuring this out: that would be progressive revelation. That's one way of thinking about it. You can think about that in religious terms, but you could also think about it as humanity consulting itself, each individual talking to themselves, which is what we do when we think. Each individual communicating with every other individual, and gathering a body of wisdom that helps people orient themselves in the toughest conditions. It's an incremental process. I really do believe that's speaking purely secularly. I do believe that's what manifests itself in Biblical stories. It's the dawning enlightenment of mankind—something like that—as we start to understand the principles by which we have to live, in order to orient ourselves properly in the world.

I also do believe—this is the unspoken question. You don't have any idea how rich and fulfilling your life could be, despite its tragedy and limitation, if you stopped doing the things that you know to be wrong. It's a really grand experiment. One of the things that God tells Abraham, constantly, as the story progresses—especially every time Abraham makes a sacrifice—God says, "walk with me, and be perfect." It's something like that. And so the injunction is, aim high; establish this relationship with the highest thing that you can conceive of. You might as well do that, because what are you going to do, establish a relationship with the most mediocre thing you can conceive of? Or are you going to establish relationship with the lowest thing that you can conceive of? People do that, and I wouldn't recommend it. It's a really bad thing. There's a lot of pain associated with that, and maybe there's pain that can expand into a world-destroying force, down that route. There's absolutely no doubt about that. Is there something superstitious and foolish about attempting to establish a contractual relationship with the source of all being? I just don't see that as an erroneous conception. It's not necessary, perhaps, to get lost in the details. We can argue forever about what God might or might not be, but we could at least say that the concept of God is an embodiment of humanity's highest ideal. We could at least agree on that. And then you might say, 'well, is that real?' The first

thing I would say about that is, there's a lot of things about the world we don't understand. The second thing I would say is, it depends bloody well on what you mean by 'real.' That's for sure. That turns out to be a very complicated question.

Ok, so Abram had just gone off to fight a bunch of kings, and get his nephew back, which seemed to be a pretty courageous act. So that brought a story to an end. It's interesting. I think what happens in the narrative is that there's a story. So Abraham is somewhere, and he goes somewhere else. That's a story, and he has adventures along the way. Those adventures are usually the typical kind of adventure, which is a rift in the structure of the story, and exposure to a kind of chaos and novelty, and then a reconstitution of the mode of being. So that's a classic story: you are somewhere; you're a certain way; you're moving forward; something happens that you don't expect; it blows you into pieces; it introduces chaos; you face the dragon; you get the gold, or maybe the bloody thing eats you, and the story is over, and then you get to where you're going. But then the question is, well, what happens when you get to where you're going? That's a really important issue.

One of the things that happens to people all the time in their life is that they get to where they're going, and then they don't know what to do. For example, when you graduate from university: It's like, ok, story over. Who are you, now? Who are you the next day? What happens is, when you succeed, then there's a success crisis. The success crisis is, well, I've run this story to its end. Now what? That's exactly what happens in the Abrahamic stories. They're punctuated by a period of contemplation and sacrifice. So every time an Abrahamic story comes to its end, then Abraham makes another sacrifice, and communes with God, and then he figures out what to do next. That seems psychologically right. What you should do when your story comes to an end, when you've achieved what it is that you want to achieve—or perhaps when you're in terribly dire straits, but we won't talk about that at the moment—the next question is, ok, now I'm that person, or I have that character. What do I need to do next? Some of that is always, well, what do I need to give up? What do I need to let go of so I can move to the next plateau? Assuming that your life is, hopefully, a sequence of upward moving...It's like [Sisyphus](#), but each time you climb up the mountain, you get a little higher on the mountain. It's something like that. So it's Sisyphus with an optimistic bent. And, maybe if you push the rock up the mountain properly, and let it roll down, and if you do that right, then it's ok. Every time you roll it back up, it's better, in some sense. I don't think that's unrealistic, either.

Abraham goes and rescues his nephew from this tyrannical king, and that's very brave. He doesn't take any reward for it, because, as far as he's concerned, it's just a manifestation of the right thing. And then he has another vision.

"After these things"—that's the battle—"the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. "And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness. And he said unto him, I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" And then he does a sacrifice: "Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." And then God comes down, and, well, Abraham goes into a trance—that's what it appears to be, in the story—and has a great terror, and then God appears to him. I'll just review this commentary, again. This is from [Joseph Benson](#): "And when the sun was going down"—that's about the time when you wash up for the evening—and he's "praying and waiting till toward evening; a deep sleep fell upon Abram—not a common sleep through weariness or carelessness, but a divine ecstasy, that, being wholly taken off from things sensible, he might be wholly taken up with the contemplation of things spiritual."

Very strange—a very, very strange series of interpretations. It does seem that what happens to Abraham is that he falls into some sort of revelatory trance. And so, as I've taken some pains to explain, we don't really understand such things. We can't rule out their existence, because there's too much evidence that they do, in fact, occur. Perhaps it's a technology that we no longer possess. That's one possibility. Perhaps we no longer know how to access these sorts of states of consciousness. It's certainly possible.

"And lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him—this was designed to strike an awe upon the spirit of Abram, and to possess him with a holy reverence. Holy fear prepares the soul for holy joy; God humbles first, and then lifts up."

I think that's right, too. One of the experiences I've had in my life—fairly commonly, in a variety of different ways...This is especially true when I was paying a lot of attention to my dreams, which I did for about 15 years, I guess. Something like that. Now and then I would feel like I'd learned some things, and had sort of consolidated them, and then, before I went to sleep, I'd think, ok, I'm ready to learn something else. I didn't say that without trepidation, because, usually, when you learn something, it's not that pleasant. You usually learn something about why you're wrong, and the deeper the thing that you learn, the more you learn about why you're wrong. There's a death that's associated with that, because then you have to let that part of you that's wrong die. That's the sacrifice, right? You have to be willing to make a sacrifice before you're going to learn something. And perhaps what you'll learn is in proportion to your willingness to make a sacrifice. I really do believe that. I also think that, if you commit to something, that means that you don't do a bunch of other things, right? So that's a sacrifice of all those other things. You commit to it, and you set your sights on it. If you really commit to it, and you get the sacrifice right, so to speak, then the probability that that thing will be successful vastly increases. I think that's also not a naive way of thinking, or a foolish way of thinking. My experience has been that that's the case.

Back to the dream. I mean, I do think that we learn in trepidation, and that, most of the time, you have to be laid low before the new revelation can make itself manifest. I think that's also what happens to people, often, in psychedelic experiences, when they have a bad trip. They don't get through the bad part of it, and maybe that's because there's so much mess in their lives. Now, I'm speculating, but it's informed speculation. There's so much mess in their lives that the altered state of conscious makes manifest that it's like a little trip through hell. But the mess is so complete, comprehensive, and all-pervading that there's no way they can get through it. Now, if they could get through it, and start to sort those things out, there would be, perhaps, a compensatory, positive revelation, at the end. But the first thing is, if you want to learn something, you're going to encounter...Well, you have to figure out what's wrong before you can figure out what wisdom you need next, to guide yourself. That's no laughing matter. So I think that's what this refers to. I think that's the sort of psychological experience that this refers to.

We built this a little bit into the [Future Authoring Program](#). I read this really cool paper, once. It was a review by this guy named [Jeffrey Gray](#). Jeffrey Gray wrote a book called [The Neuropsychology of Anxiety](#), and that is a great book. It is



impossible to read. It took me, really, like six months to read it. The reason for that is that he reviewed about 3,000 papers, and they were all neurological papers, and heavy psychological-slash-biological papers. He actually read them all, and he understood them, and he synthesized them. And then he wrote this book about the synthesis. He's very, very careful of his terminology. And so to read the book you have to understand brain anatomy, neuropharmacology, the whole literature on animal behaviour, and a whole whopping dose of human psychology and cybernetics. It's a vicious book, but you really learn something when you read it, if you go through it bit by bit. It's had an overwhelming influence on psychology, even among people who haven't read it, which is most of the people who cite it, by the way.

He outlined this real cool study about how to motivate rats. Rats are a lot like us, in positive and negative ways. Biochemically and psychopharmacologically, they're very, very similar, and they have very complex social environments. They have hierarchies, and they play, and they laugh. [Jaak Panksepp](#) found out that rats laugh if you tickle them. You can tickle them with the end of a pencil eraser, but you can't hear them laughing, because they laugh ultrasonically, like rats, so you have to record it, then slow it down. Then you can hear them giggling away, when you tickle them. You think, 'you're going to spend 50,000 dollars on a study demonstrating that rats laugh?' And you think, 'well, wait a second. That's a major league study: Jaak Panksepp discovered the play circuit in mammals.' That's a bloody big deal. If you get that by rubbing rats with a pencil eraser, then good for you.

Anyways, Gray talked a lot about how to motivate a rat. You might have heard about [B.F. Skinner](#). He used food pellets to motivate his rats. But what you don't know about Skinner is that those rats were starved to three quarters of their normal body weight, so they would work for food, man. Skinner's rats were kind of oversimplified. But you can get rats to work for food. They don't have to be that hungry. They'll do all sorts of things. They'll press levers, and they'll open doors, and they'll solve problems. One of the things you can do to kind of measure how much the rat is motivated—let's say you've run him through a maze, and he knows there's some food at the end of the maze. You can tie a little spring to his tail, and see how hard he pulls when you open the door to the maze, because that's how much work the rat is willing to do. So you can measure that. Or you can see how fast he skitters down the maze. You can get an estimate about the rat's motivation. And so then you might say, 'well, how motivated is a hungry rat?' The answer would be, it depends on how hungry he

is. But there's another answer: it also depends on what's chasing him when he's going after the food. So if you have a rat, and you have food over here, and you waft in some cat odour—rats hate cat odour, and it's innate; they never have to see or smell a cat to be absolutely petrified by cat odour—and then open the door, that rat will zoom to that food a lot faster than if it's just hungry. So a rat running away from something that it doesn't want, towards something that it does want, is a very motivated rat.

There's this idea in the Old Testament that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. It's a pretty harsh idea. But there's something really useful about it. One of the things you see with people, all the time, is that maybe they're trying to stumble forward, towards their ideal, as poorly defined as it might be, but then they're afraid, right? They're afraid about what they might encounter, and that stops them, because fear does stop people. It freezes you, like a prey animal. People move ahead, but then they get afraid, and then they stop moving ahead, and that's not so good. Negative emotion is a really powerful motivator, so we're more motivated by negative emotion than positive emotion, quantitatively speaking. Quantitatively speaking, you can measure that. That's, I think, because we can only be so happy, but we can really be suffering and dead. You have to pay more attention to the negative, and that's bad, because the negative can stop you.

In my clinical practice, I often talk to people who are trying to make a difficult life decision. They are weighing out the costs and the benefits of making the life decision. One of the things I always talk to them about is, wait a second, that's an incomplete analysis. You have to weigh out the benefits and the costs of doing this, and you have to weigh out the costs and benefits of not doing it. That's not the same as the zero that you assume that you're starting with, right? Because to not make a decision also has a cost, and sometimes the cost of not making a decision is far worse than the cost of making a decision, even if the decision is risky. And so one of the things you can derive from that—and this is very useful, I think—is that—this is also, I think, why it's so useful to contemplate your mortality, so to speak—you're screwed no matter what you do. That actually frees you. You have path A that has catastrophes, and you have path B that has catastrophes, and you don't get to have the no catastrophe path, but you get to pick which one. That's really something. If you know that there's terrible risk associated with everything that you do and don't do, then you can afford to take some risks, because you're not—this is all within the ark metaphor. I'm still making the case that, despite the fact that your life is

essentially catastrophic, you can make a covenant with the highest ideal, and that will take you through it the best way possible. I'm still making that case.

So then you think, ok, 'I'm trying to make this decision. I'm going to try to do something difficult, and isn't that terrifying.' And then you think, 'yeah, but wait a minute. What's really terrifying is not doing it.' And then you think about the cost of not doing it. In the [Future Authoring Program](#), we have people do this little meditative exercise, which is, ok, think about your insufficiencies, by your own definition, the way that you don't do what you know you should do—about the things that you do, that you shouldn't do, that you know you shouldn't do beyond a shadow of a doubt. There's some things like that. That's bad habits, and poor aim, and resentment, and hatred, and aggression, and unresolved conflicts, and all those things that are dementing and warping you. And then think, ok, those things get the upper hand, man. They get the upper hand, and they take you to the worst possible place you could go in the next three to five years. What exactly does that look like? And so you sketch all that out, and you think, 'hey, I don't want to go there.' The next time that a temptation comes up, you think, 'well, it'd be a lot better for me if I didn't succumb to this temptation.' That's kind of weak, eh? You'd look a little better if you didn't eat like a cheesecake a day, or something like that. That's something, but it's not the same as, I'm going to have diabetes, and I'm going to lose my damn leg in five years if I don't get my eating under control. That's motivating. So then the temptation comes along, and you think, 'oh, how about no?' Seriously—how about no? Not just because a higher good would be obtained if I avoided it, but because a terrible catastrophe would be averted if I didn't.

Well, so you want to get your fear behind you, right? You want to get it behind you, where it's pushing you forward, instead of in front of you, where it's stopping you. You get your fear behind you, pushing you forward, by actually thinking through the consequences of not putting your life together, and that the least of those is that you waste it, and suffer. You're going to suffer anyways, man, so you waste it, and suffer. That's a bad deal, because, maybe, if you're going to suffer, you could at least do something noble, glorious, upright, powerful, honourable, admirable, helpful, and difficult. That's just so much better, and maybe that's good enough so that you think, 'hey, a little suffering; it's basically worth it. At least it's a way forward.'

"And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not their's, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four

hundred years." God, he's hedging his bets here a lot, right? He says to Abraham, 'well, go out into the world,' and then he confronts him with a famine, and he confronts him with a tyranny, and with powerful people who want to take his wife, and then he loses his nephew, and then he has to go fight a war, and now he's reconstituting this covenant. God says, 'yeah, a nation is going to come from you, but they're going to be slaves to tyrants for like 400 years.' He's not a great salesman, exactly. But the thing I like about it is that it's realistic. You gotta think, too, who knows why it is that the Bible exists, or why people wrote it? But, you know, if they're gonna sell you something, I don't know if this is the way to do it.

Unless you're a salesman who's sophisticated beyond belief—because you'd think that, if it was just a matter of controlling the masses, let's say, which is one, say, Marxist interpretation of religion, or a matter of providing people with a primitive defense against death anxiety, which is essentially the Freudian interpretation, that you'd make the deals that God cut with Abraham a little more on the positive and polished side, instead of making them a realistic offer, constantly, like they are. That's part of the reason, I think, it is reasonable to treat the Bible as literature. It's more than literature. It's something other than literature. But you can treat it as literature, and I think the reason you can treat it as literature is because the characters are all complex, including the character of God himself. It's complex and sophisticated. It's not one-sided. It's paradoxical and incomprehensible, at times, but I think good literature is like that.

Here's something about true art. This is something I learned from Jung. It's so smart. Imagine that you inhabit the land that you know, conceptually and practically. And then imagine outside of that. There's a massive space of things that you don't know. And even outside of that, there's a space of things that no one knows. So it's the known territories surrounded by the unknown. That's the canonical, archetypal landscape. The unknown manifests itself to you, and that's where new knowledge comes from. But the question is, how is that knowledge generated? It doesn't just leap from completely unknown to completely articulated in one move. That isn't how it happens. It has to pass through stages of analysis before it becomes articulable.

The first stage of analysis, as far as I can tell, is that you act it out. So if something really surprises you, you first react to it with your body. That's your first category. It's not conceptual, at all. It's embodied. And then maybe you're at home, at night. Something startles you, and you freeze. It's dark. Your imagination populates the darkness with whatever might be making the noise

imagination populates the darkness with whatever might be making the noise. That's the sequence: embodied response, imaginative representation, exploration, articulation. That's how information moves from the unknown to the known. Artists are the people who stand on that imagistic frontier. They put themselves out into the unknown, and they take a piece of it, and they transform it into some mythological image. They don't know what they're doing, exactly. They're guided by their intuition, if they're real artists. Otherwise, they're just propagandists. They have to be contending with something that they don't understand. What they do is they make it more understandable. And then people gaze at those artworks, or they listen to the stories, and then they start to become informed by them, but they don't know how or why.

I was at the modern museum of art in New York. I'm afraid I don't remember which one, unfortunately. I was in this amazing room. It had all these priceless paintings from the late renaissance hanging in it—each painting worth, who knows. A billion dollars, maybe. Priceless paintings. The room was a shrine. It was full of people from all over the world, who were looking at these paintings. You think, 'well, what the hell are these people doing, coming to this room, looking at these paintings? What are they up to?' One of them was the painting of the [Assumption of Mary](#). Brilliantly composed. All these people were looking at it. I thought, 'what are they doing? They don't know what that means. Why are they looking at that painting? Why is it in this room? Why is that painting worth so much?' And the answer to that is, well, we don't really know. It happened; they're sacred objects, in some sense. We gaze at them in ignorance and wonder. The reason for that is that the unknown shines through them at us, in partially articulated form. Well, that's the role of art, and that's the role of artists.

Real artists are contending with the unknown, and they're possessed by it. They have a personality trait—openness—that makes them do that. They can't even help it. I've had lots of creative people in my clinical practice. I can tell you, the worst thing for creative people is to not be creative, because they just die. Maybe you're a tree with a few major branches. That's your personality. So if you're extroverted, you can't be cut off from people, because you just wither. And if you're agreeable, you have to be in an intimate relationship, or you die. And if you're conscientious, and you're unemployed, you're just going to eat yourself up, because you have to have a duty, and you have to carry a load. You just can't stand it, otherwise. Open people have to be creative. They have to be, because, otherwise, they die. They don't have any vitality. They're cursed with the necessity of putting a foot out into the unknown, and making sense of it. They're

also cursed with the necessity of trying to make a living while they're doing that, which they can't, because it's almost impossible to monetize creative action, as many of you who are creative will no doubt find out. It's very, very frustrating.

It's not that creative action is without value. The creative people are entrepreneurs, and the creative people revitalize cities, and the creative people make things magnificent and beautiful. You think about what's happened in Europe over the last 2,000 years. It's amazing: an unbelievable collaboration to make things so beautiful that they're jaw dropping when you walk into them. You think about the economic value of that, right? I think it's either France or Spain that's the most visited country in the world. It's one of those two, I think. I think there's more tourists in France than there are people, most of the time. Part of the reason for that is that it's just so damn beautiful. You just can't stand it. You think, 'what's the economic value of that?' It's absolutely incalculable. What's interesting, too, is that you build that beauty in, and then the farther away you get from it in time, the more valuable it becomes, right? Instead of decaying, it has exactly the opposite effect: its value magnifies.

One of the things that I'm deeply ashamed of, as a Canadian, is that our sense of beauty is so underdeveloped. We're so primitive...It's not even primitive. That's the wrong word. I don't know what it is. It's second-rate, at least. It's terror, too, because people are afraid of beauty. But the idea that art is...The conservatives really have a problem with this, in particular. Conservative people tend not to be that creative, by temperament. It's a mystery to me, because they should be concerned with economic development, and beauty is so unbelievably crucial to economic development. It just yells out at you.

Anyways, so that's what artists are doing. One of the things I would say is, buy a damn piece of art! Find one that really speaks to you, and buy a piece of art, because you invite that into your life. Look out, if you do it. If it's a real piece of art—because you'll also get a little introduction to the artist, and then that'll seep into your life. That'll change things like mad. But it's unbelievably worth it. It opens your eyes to the domain of the transcendent. That's the right way of thinking about it. A real piece of art is a window into the transcendent. That's what it is. You need that in your life, because you're finite and limited, and bounded by your ignorance and lack of knowing. Unless you can make a connection to the transcendent, then you don't have the strength to prevail. That's part of the covenant with God. You can see that.

You look at these magnificent cathedrals that our civilization built over the centuries...They're still building the [Sagrada Familia](#) in Barcelona. It's an amazing building. I think it's going to take them 300 years to build that. People in the Middle Ages, they'd start building a cathedral, and they'd think, ah, we'll be done this in 300 years. Imagine the vision that it took to invest in something like that! We look at quarterly reports. We can't think 300 years into the future, to build something of that kind of remarkable...remarkable what? Those cathedrals are trees, first, right? They're a forest, right? The gothic cathedrals, they're forests, and the sun is shining through the branches. That's the stained glass. They're the perfect balance of light and structure. They're representing something about the proper structure of being, which is something like the proper balance between light and structure. They represent the sacred tragedy of mankind. That's why they're in the shape of a cross. They're open to the sky. That's why they have a dome. They're full of gold so that it glitters. That's like the city of God. You can see that. Integral to our culture is the idea that duty is one pathway towards God, and if you can't find another pathway, why don't you use beauty?

I'm sure most of you do that with music. Music is the one thing that modern people can't be cynical about. Thank God for that. We've been fascinated by music. It speaks meaning to people, even nihilistic, punk rockers are so damn engaged with their music that they can hardly stand it. You can knock on them and say, 'look, you're having a transcendent religious experience,' and they'll just tell you to fuck off, hah, because that's what punk rockers have to do. But that's still what's happening.

Ok, so I got into all of that because I was talking about the Bible as literature. We need, in our culture, to justify the arts. I don't want to do that by talking about high culture, or about something abstract and evanescent. That's the wrong way to go about it. This is vital. One of the things that's really interesting about the University of Toronto is that the one side of the campus, where we are, is beautiful, medieval cathedral, and the other side is Godawful factory. The thing is, the attitude towards knowledge has paralleled that architectural transformation. At one point, the humanities, let's say, were a sacred endeavour, and so was the art of being educated in the university. That's turned into mass factory, and that's reflected in the architecture. This isn't accidental. None of this happens by random chance. It's not like there's a conspiracy or anything, because there isn't. But that doesn't mean that these things aren't tangled together. The loss of beauty in the universities is a catastrophe. Without that

beauty, there's no call to higher being.

I've mentioned to people that they should clean up their rooms. That's become quite the internet meme. But I'm really serious about it, because it's really hard to do that. I've been cleaning up my room, by the way, for about four months, now. My life was thrown into such a catastrophe, and also we were renovating. But it isn't just that you clean it up; you also make it beautiful. It's really hard to make something beautiful. It's really worthwhile, and what's really cool is that, if you learn to make something beautiful, even one thing, if you can make one thing in your life beautiful, then you've established a relationship with beauty, and then you can start to expand that relationship with beauty out into the world, into other elements of your life. That is so worthwhile. It's just incredibly, crazily worthwhile. That's an invitation to the divine. You have to be daring to do that.

People are terrified of colour; they paint their walls beige. They're terrified of art; they buy some mass-produced thing because they don't want anybody laughing at them for their lack of taste, and they would get laughed at, because they have no taste. Well, it's right, because what do you know? But you have to develop it, and so you're going to stumble along, and make mistakes, to begin with. Somebody comes over, and goes, 'heh, what's up with you?' It's kind of hard on your self-esteem. But you're stumbling towards the kingdom of God. That's what you're stumbling towards when you try to make an aesthetic decision, and put something in your life that's beautiful. It's unbelievably worthwhile to do that. You have to steer clear of the frauds and the con artists and all of that. Art is full of that, of course, because it's difficult to distinguish between the real thing and the fraud. But it's unbelievably worthwhile. And so back to literature.

I'm telling you this partly because I've been thinking a lot about the humanities and the arts. Practically speaking—because I know that artistic types are also entrepreneurial types, and the same personality types, and so it's very much worthwhile to make an economic and practical case for this sort of thing. You study literature and the humanities so that you can familiarize yourself with the wisdom of our civilization. You should do that, because people have been working on this thing for a long time. It's rich beyond comparison, so why wouldn't you do that? You teach yourself to read, and you teach yourself to speak, and you teach yourself to think, and you teach yourself to communicate. I can tell you, if you can read, think, and communicate, you are absolutely, 100 percent unstoppable.



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That's another thing that's so interesting about the humanities education, that's at the core of the university: there's nothing more economically valuable than teaching people how to articulate themselves and communicate. They can identify problems; they can formulate solutions; they can negotiate consensus; they can negotiate on their own behalf, and on the behalf of others... There's absolutely no downside to it, except that there's responsibility that goes along with it, but it doesn't matter, because there's no escape from responsibility. You can either take it voluntarily or involuntarily. Those are your options. There aren't any other options. And so we need to understand the role of art and literature, and stop thinking about it as an option. It's not an option. "Man does not live by bread alone." That's exactly right. We live by beauty. We live by literature. We live by art. Literally, not metaphorically. We cannot live without it, because life is too dismal and tragic in the absence of the sublime. And ourselves, we have to be sharp, so that we can survive properly, and orient the world properly, and not destroy things, including ourselves.

Back to the Bible, which I do think is reasonably construed as a piece of literature. It's deep, and the people who wrote it had at least one foot in the unknowable, and they're trying to communicate what they experienced in the unknowable, to make it known. That's partly what we're trying to do in this series, and what you're trying to do while you're listening, so good for that.

"And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance." There will be a period of tyranny. There's a psychological truth to that, too.

One of the things I learned from reading Nietzsche—because you can learn a lot from reading Nietzsche. That's for sure. He talked about the Catholic Church. Nietzsche's often construed as a great critic of Christianity, and he certainly was, but he was no casual critic. In fact, I think he was the sort of critic who you'd like to have as a friend. He was the sort of critic that said, 'well, here's the great things you've done, and that you could keep doing, but here's a bunch of things that you did that you should really stop doing.' He talked about the Catholic Church, and he said that the Catholic Church had disciplined the European mind, so that over a period of 1,000 years, 1,300 years, 1,400 years, there was this rule that there was a conceptual structure within which you had to interpret everything. What that did was turn the educated European mind into a systematizing, cognitive entity. Once that systematizing, cognitive entity had been established, then it could free itself from those underlying disciplinary

been established, then it could free itself from those underlying disciplinary structures, and go off, and do such things as produce the scientific revolution, for example, which required incredible systematic thinking.

Nietzsche had this really interesting idea about freedom. He believed that slavery was an intermediary between the undeveloped individual and the free individual—that you had to submit yourself to some intense disciplinary process, for some period of time in your life, before you could develop any true freedom. You think, maybe you want to learn to play the piano. It's like, that's not going to be any fun for a really long period of time, right? Because you're really bad at it, and there's a million things you have to memorize, and you have to stumble around like an amateur. The same thing happens when kids learn how to read, and some of them never get past that point, and they never get to the point where they can enjoy reading. But in order to put yourself together, you have to put yourself in a vise, and allow yourself to be constricted—and mangled, even—by the thing that enslaves. But the goal should be that, as a consequence of submitting to the discipline, that you become disciplined. And then, once you become disciplined, you can emerge from the disciplinary structure as someone who's free. That's something that's very much worth thinking about, as well.

That's illustrated, conceptually, in this piece of literature. The psychological meaning of what God tells Abraham is that all people are subject—not equally, obviously—to the tyranny that precedes freedom. That idea is repeated over and over in the Old Testament, and it comes out most particularly in the story of Moses. That's the story of movement from tyranny. Where do you go from a tyranny? It's an absolute catastrophe. You go from a tyranny into the desert, where you starve. It's harsh. That's what happens in the story of Exodus. That's so interesting, too, because what it means is that, sometimes, if you're going to move uphill, the first thing that happens is you move downhill a lot. So if you want to escape from the straits that bind you, you're not going to move forward and up: you're going to move forward and down. This is also something that Jung talked about a lot. On the road to enlightenment, you encounter all the things that you don't want to encounter, first—all the weakness of your Self, all the realizations of the tyranny of the world, and the catastrophe of nature, and all of that. You step out of your ignorant encapsulation, and it's an immediate plummet into something that's a desert, let's say, where everything's chaotic, and where you're wandering around without direction. A real catastrophe.

One of the things you might ask yourself is that, if enlightenment is possible, then why aren't people enlightenment? If it was just a matter of going from a

good place to a better place, it's like, well, man, let's just get at it! It's no problem, right? Why would we ever stop doing that? But it seems not to be that. It's that you're here, and that's not good, and it's unstable, and you step out of it, and it's down—down to where you don't want to be. You have to contend with that. And then, maybe, you can start your struggle upward. God is telling Abraham this. He's also telling him that it's ok. It's rough, though.

"And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again"—that's the Israelites: the descendants of Abraham—"for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." God is going to leave the tyrants alone until they've manifested their full tyranny, for reasons that we don't fully understand.

"And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces."

[Albert Barnes](#) said, "the oven of smoke and lamp of flame symbolize the destruction"—which we've already talked about: this catastrophe of the initial stages—"and the light of salvation. Their passing through the pieces of the victims and probably consuming them as an accepted sacrifice are the ratification of the covenant on the part of God, as the dividing and presenting of them were on the part of Abram." "In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given his land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates. Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar." So this is a big catastrophe for Abraham, especially in those times. Perhaps it's a big catastrophe, now, although perhaps people aren't as conscious of it as they once were. For Abraham, without a biological son, there was no vision forward into the future. We don't really know what sort of timespan over which these archaic people thought. But the medieval people, we already said, could think 300 years into the future, without batting an eye. These people, who were concerned about their descendants, were obviously thinking about existence in a way that wasn't just focused on their immediate existence, right? They were thinking about, well, their children, grandchildren, and maybe their great-grandchildren—and maybe the whole society that stemmed out from them. That's smart.

One of the things I learned from [Piaget](#), at least in part, was his idea of the equilibrated state, which he thought about as part of the biological basis of the idea of moral progress. It's something like that. Piaget was very, very smart. He

said that the proper equilibrated state is one where—imagine you have a family. You’ve got five people in it, and you’re doing what you want, in your family, what’s good for you. But you’re doing it in such a way that the other four members of your family agree with what you do, and that it also facilitates them doing what they want, and what they should be doing. And so it’s a really tricky range. It isn’t just for you; it’s for you in a way that’s for them. You could also see that that would be something that would be a multiplier, right? If you have everyone working voluntarily towards the same common goal, then you get a multiplying effect of that. And then you might think, well, it’s not just you and your family: It’s you and your family today, and next week, and next month, and next year, and 10 years from now, so you have to take the timespan into account. And then it should be you and your family in a way that works well in society, and then it should work well now, and next week, and next year, and into the future. It should be iterable.

It’s something like the idea of sustainability. I would say that’s a reasonable way of conceptualizing the holy city. It’s something like that. If you’re trying to make it concrete, it’s like, how should you live your life? Well, let’s say you live your life in a manner that justifies its limitation and tragedy. That’s a good start. But then, let’s say that it does that in a way that also reduces the limitations and suffering of the people that you interact with, now and into the future. Well, maybe there’s a way to do that. A good negotiation does that, right? Because if you’re negotiating with someone, like your wife, for example, what you want is for her to agree with the negotiation. Here is one of the things that Piaget said, which I think was brilliant: if you take an equilibrated system—a family, let’s say—and a dis-equilibrated system—that would be one where the father is a tyrant, and everyone is operating under his whip—and you put them into a head-to-head competition, the equilibrated system will outcompete the dis-equilibrated system, because the enforcement cost is such that it will slow the system down. You’ll get resistances from the people inside the system; the system will be working at counter-purposes to itself, plus there’s enforcement costs. And so a tyranny cannot beat an equilibrated system.

I was really excited to encounter that idea. When I encountered it, I was also trying to figure out if there was some quantitative difference between the system, say, of the Soviet Union and Maoist China, and the systems of the West, apart from just arbitrary world interpretation, as the postmodern nihilists might have it—if there was something fundamental at stake in the terrible Cold War that we fought, or if it was just a matter of opinion. The Piagetian take was that, well,

roughly speaking, the west was an equilibrated system—not perfectly equilibrated, but reasonably equilibrated, in that people, even if they were slaves to some degree, were at least voluntary slaves, instead of involuntary slaves, and that was better. The system was actually technically better, and not just as a matter of interpretation. That’s a lovely thing to know. I think it’s a really, really solid idea. I haven’t been able to put crowbars under that idea, and lift it up. I think it’s a good one.

"Now Sarai Abram’s wife bare him no children." Ok, so back to children. One of the things that’s worth thinking about with regards to reading these old stories—because modern people are very arrogant. We look at these old stories, and we think, ah, we’ve transcended all that superstition. It’s like, don’t be so bloody sure about that. These people weren’t stupid. There are ways that they viewed the world that we don’t have anymore. One of them seems to be this concern for descendants, because that just isn’t part of our way of thinking. We have a very short-term way of thinking. It’s not even one lifetime long. It’s certainly not multiple lifetimes long. It isn’t clear to me, at all, that that’s for the best. The constant complain that the environmentalists generate—some of which is justified, and some of which is anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal nonsense that should be cleared out of that entire conversation—is that we need to take a longer view, and consider more things in our purview when we act. That’s fair enough. Do we really want an ocean with nothing in it but jellyfish? Because that’s really what we’re doing, and we’re doing it very, very, rapidly. That data on that are very clear.

When you lift up your eyes, and you make a connection with something that’s transcendent, then that should bring more of the world within your purview. Maybe that’s concern for the endless number of descendants that you might have. You might think, too, well, if you’re a successful person, if you have a successful family, God only know how many people you will be the father of. You’re a nexus, right? All sorts of things have come together in the cosmos to produce you. All sorts of things manifest themselves from you. You have no idea what the potential consequences of your actions might be, as they cascade across time. And so Abraham, at least, is concerned with these sorts of things. God is concerned, too, because he promises Abraham, if he maintains the covenant, that the most important things that he needs will come to him.

They’re pretty serious about this. Sarai talks to Abraham. She’s not very happy about the fact that she can’t have children. She says, "behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I

may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai."

Well, that's not a very trivial thing, I wouldn't think. I wouldn't imagine that Sarai was very happy about turning her maid over to her husband, and potentially being usurped in the whole childbearing process. Not in the least. It's also a major sacrifice on Sarai's part. There's no doubt about that. Of course, it's very difficult for us to talk about the ethics of the fact that Hagar was more or less and involuntary participant in this. That was the times; that was absolutely the case. Of course, slavery and indentured servitude is the way of mankind, except in very, very limited circumstances.

Carl Jung had something to say about that, too, which I really liked. He said that part of the reason that modern people—it's not the only reason. There's the industrial revolution, obviously. But part of the reason that modern people have been able to escape from the catastrophe of tyranny and slavery is because we've agreed to make ourselves our own slaves. So instead of owning a slave, you own yourself, in a sense. You trot yourself off to work, and exploit yourself, so that you can stay alive. Maybe it's not something that you want to do, but you've taken on the role of slave, in some sense, in relationship to your own survival, instead of forcing someone else to do it—which is also something, I think, that's very noble about the West: we're willing to enslave ourselves as individuals, and we're not doing that to other people, now. We're doing it to some degree, obviously, because the society is imperfect, but that's something that's very much worth thinking about.

"And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife."

One of the other things that's so interesting about doing this Biblical series, and it's one of the things that's so cool about Google...despite the fact that they cut off my account. Hah. You can find any piece of art that ever existed, on Google. That's great. When I'm trying to illustrate these lectures, I type in, "Abraham renaissance," and I get like 200 renaissance paintings. It's so great, and then I can look at them. One of the other things that's so remarkable is that the major themes of these stories have been illustrated by people of spectacular, mind-expanding talent. There's just this endless array of...Well, look at that. That's an amazing painting. There's dozens of paintings on this theme. It's just another indication of just how obsessed people—you know, this is the only book that existed for years. People were absolutely obsessed by it, and produced all these

existed, for years. People were absolutely obsessed by it, and produced all these amazing things from it. We're in danger from losing that. That's a big mistake, because it's magnificent. A little humility would go a long way towards restoring it.

"And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes." So Hagar was successful, and that was a hallmark of feminine success—now and certainly then—and so she started to lord it over Sarai, which seemed a little on the ungrateful side, I would say, because Sarai made a big sacrifice to allow Hagar to become Abram's wife. A little bit of gratitude would have been in order, I suppose. At least that's how the story goes. "And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the Lord judge between me and thee. "But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thine hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face. And the angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur. And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai. "And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands. And the angel of the Lord said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Behold, thou art with child and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael"—Ishmael means 'God hears,' by the way—"because the Lord hath heard thy affliction. And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren. "And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me? Wherefore the well was called Beerlahairoi." That means the well of 'sees me and lives.'

It's an interesting interlude. God has established this covenant with Abraham. Obviously, things are going wrong in the household, in a really serious way. He's now had a child by another woman, and the two women are not getting along, and one is beating the other because of her insubordination and contempt. She's so desperate, she runs out into the desert, where she's probably going to die. God comes along, and says to Hagar that her son shall, as well, be the father of nations. That's partly a reflection back on the power of Abraham's covenant. Even though things are going terribly wrong locally, let's say, the fact that Abraham has made this overarching agreement with God means that all of these

catastrophes are taking place within a bounded space—within the ark, we could say. That's one way of looking at it.

I do think that's right, because it seems to me that, if everything falls apart around you, there's a couple of things you're going to want: You're going to want someone standing beside you, that you can trust. That's for sure. You're going to want your family around you. You're going to want them to have your back, and you're going to want to know that you didn't do some goddamn stupid thing to bring all hell down on yourself. If you're lacking any of those when that crisis comes, there's a high probability it will flatten you, and you won't be able to get up.

You can ask yourself this question: when things collapse around you, how much utility is knowledge of your own moral virtue? It's bad to be laid low, but to be laid low, and to know that you were at fault for it, and, worse, that things that you did, that you knew you did, that were wrong, brought you there. I think that you have nothing to stand on, in that situation. That's also the circumstances which, I think, you're more likely, at least, to be abandoned by people around you. Given that you know that the catastrophe is coming, that the tragedy of life will strike you, the question is, well, how do you fortify yourself against that? Obviously, to some degree, you do that by being materially sensible. These ancient people, in the Old Testament, they weren't blind to the utility of having a good crop and some animals. Taking care of themselves physically was an integral part of their life. But they're also wise enough to know that there is an element of moral...What would you call it? There's a necessity for moral integration that defends you against the catastrophe of existence, even more effectively than anything material. And, even more, that the stability of the material things is more dependent on the integrity of your spirit than the integrity of your spirit is dependent on the material things. I think the evidence for that is actually quite clear.

I read a very interesting book a while back, called [The Wealth and Poverty of Nations](#), that was written by a Harvard emeritus professor of history. One of the things that he claimed—I like it; I thought it was very smart—was that the only true natural resource is interpersonal trust. If you can set up a society where people trust each other, then it will instantly become rich. He used the example of Japan, which is a very conscientious and rich society. The Japanese have no natural resources—none to speak of, and yet they're rich. And then you have countries like Russia, and much of South America, where there's just natural



resources that...Like Venezuela: more natural resources than you know what to do with. The places are absolute catastrophes of cynicism and corruption. He attempted to document the relationship between default interpersonal trust among citizens within countries, and their productivity, their GDP, and their standard of living, and found a very, very tight relationship.

I like that a lot. I've got a story about that, quickly, that I think is very interesting. I'll tell you two stories, one sort of generic. Well, I'll tell you a personal one, first. So one day I lent my car to one of my graduate students. He took it to Montreal, this old cadillac. There was a really bad rainstorm in Montreal. He was in one of the highways that are set into the ground, and there's like six inches of water. He was turning a corner, hit the brakes, skidded on the water, and one corner of the bumper smacked it into the wall. So then he brought it back, and he was very apologetic about it. His name was Matt Shane. I'll tell you that, because Matt might hear this, and I can shame him a bit for doing this, 20 years ago. He's a professor at the Ontario Institute of Technology, I think, and quite a successful one.

Anyways, he brought the car back. I went and got it evaluated for damages. It was like 1,700 dollars or something to repair it. Maybe more. But it was almost as much as the car was worth. I thought, 'well, I'm not going to do that.' I went online, and I typed in the part. If you do that, you can get people to bid on sending you a used part from all over North America. That's kind of cool. All these junk dealers have got together, and they have this network of communications. You put in a car part, and they send you a bid. So this guy said, 'well, I'll send you the bumper assembly, which is the whole bumper and the lights, for like 250 bucks.' I thought, 'yeah, ok. You can do that; that'd be good.' So then I said yes.

He called me up about half an hour later, this guy from way down south. He had a really deep Mississippi accent. He said, 'wait a sec; was that for the bumper, or for the bumper assembly?' And I said, 'well, it was for the bumper assembly.' And he said, 'oh, I thought it was for the bumper.' But he said, 'that's ok. I'll send it to you anyways.' I thought, whoa, that's pretty good. So then I said thank you, and I hung up. Half an hour later he called me up again. He said, 'look, I just went out and looked at that bumper assembly. There's a plastic trim piece on the side, and it has a scratch in it. I thought I'd better tell you that just in case you didn't want it.' I thought, wow, that's so amazing! There's a miracle, man. This guy, he's somewhere in Mississippi. I'm never going to see him, ever—  
never going to have any contact with him again. He made a bad deal, right

never going to have any contact with him again. He made a bad deal, right, because the part was worth more than he decided to sell it to me for, but he stuck with this deal, and then he went over and above the call of duty. He said, well, this part that I'm selling to you for way less than it's worth is damaged, so I thought I'd better tell you. It's like, man, you gotta recognize a miracle when you see one. That was a miracle. So I said, 'hey, look, thanks for calling, man. It's ok; I can handle the scratch. Send the part.' He did, and I got the car fixed, and forgave Matt, and had a happy ending.

That's trust, right? I didn't know him from Adam, and he's a primate full of snakes, just like the rest of us. And yet he was willing to simplify himself to the point where I could just take him absolutely at his word. That meant we could trade, even though we were strangers. It's like, man, do not underestimate the utility of that. And then there's eBay. So when eBay first started, the idea was—it's not going to work: you'll send me junk, and I'll send you a cheque that bounces, and that'll be the end of eBay, right? These escrow agents popped up, so you could insure your transaction with them. It was like 10 percent of the transaction. They would get the cheque and the goods, and make sure that they were ok, and then send them on, or insure the transaction. But what happened was the escrow agents didn't make any money. The reason for that was no one cheated. You think about how amazing that is, right? You bring these people together across a whole continent. They've never seen each other before; they're never going to interact with each other again, and this was before there were any reputation ratings on eBay. And yet the default interaction was, you describe your goods honestly, including their flaws, you set a reasonable price, I decide to pay, you ship the goods, and I pay you, and it works. What happened was that eBay produced a tremendous amount of capital that was previously frozen. So frozen capital is when you've invested money in something, but the thing is no longer useful to you, so the money is just sitting there, frozen, so to speak. You can't get it loose, because you've got an attic full of junk. How are you going to get rid of that? Oh, eBay! All of a sudden, all of these things that were just junk became valuable. Everybody got richer, and none of that would have happened without the covenant that we established between each other, that's predicated on trust. And so you might say that trust is the currency, and currency is trust, because it's a promissory note. If people lie, then the currency gets debased very, very rapidly. And so the economy runs on trust. That's part of the overarching covenant.

So Abraham makes this covenant with God, and he decides that he's going to aim high, and live a good life, and tell the truth. That puts this boundary around

him. It's like a walled garden, and, inside there, there's all sorts of things that are happening that are complex and difficult, but there's a boundary outside. The boundary is, well, maybe things won't—it's like God says, after the flood: he says, 'I'll never send a flood again.' That's part of the story. There's an intimation, there, that, no matter how bad things get, they won't get so bad that they'll be catastrophic. But there's a coda to that, which is that you have to maintain a covenant.

We don't know what that means, you know? It's pretty obvious that, if you're being hard-nosed and sensible, you understand that, and you trust people—that's an act of courage, if you're not naive. If you're naive, it's an act of stupidity, because you might get bit, and you probably will. If you're naive, and you get bit, you will suffer for it. It will traumatize you. But if you're not naive, and you know you can get bit, you might ask, what should you do with people? The answer is, you should trust them. Not because you're naive, and not because they couldn't betray you, and not because you don't know that they could betray you, but because, if you hold out your hand in trust, then you're inviting the best part of that person to step forward, and that won't happen unless you take that initial step. That's courage, not naivety. To trust someone once your eyes are open is an act of courage. That opens up the world.

There's this idea in the story that you can withstand a fair bit of the catastrophe of life by establishing the proper covenant, and by acting in a trustworthy manner, and by extending your hand to people properly. You might say, well, ok. That's sensible; I can understand how that would work, and I can certainly see how the opposite wouldn't work. If I have to be absolutely terrified that you're going to betray me at every possible moment, and we're in a negotiation, we're not going to get any work done, man. I'm going to be figuring out what you're up to, all the time, and you're going to be figuring out what I'm up to, all the time, and we're just not going to get anywhere. You'll come and say you're going to do something, and I can just simplify you. I can say, 'you're going to do what you said you'll do.' I don't have to worry about you. The same applies to me, and then we can go do something, and that's how we generate wealth.

Well, what's the ultimate limit of that? We know that there's corruption in our society, and that people betray each other, and there's deceit and all of that, and it causes things like the periodic collapse in 2008, which was complicated, but was partly engendered by corruption. What would be the upside if we really determined to act honestly? What do you think it is that people would be able to do with the world if we stopped acting in a corrupt manner? I mean, what is the

do with the world if we stopped acting in a corrupt manner? I mean, what is the upside? How far back could we push aging, do you think, if we hit it hard for 50 years? Could we triple our lifespan? It wouldn't surprise me. All these terrible diseases that beset the planet, we could get rid of them. There's no reason for hunger and starvation. We make enough food. It's like, what would happen if we stopped acting badly? How much better could things get? Well, you start locally, I think. You start with yourself, and you start with your family.

There's intimations of the divine. There's intimations of the kingdom of God, and of the covenant with God in the Old Testament. You think, 'well, we speak secularly.' Well, that's an unprovable assumption. Hold on a second—what's the assumption, here, exactly? What is the upper end for humanity? Who's gonna say, especially in this day and age? There's so many things happening that you can't even comprehend them. What could we do if we put all of our effort into it? Well, you could experiment with that, because you could start in your own household. You could start in your own room. You could make miracles happen in the confines of your own space. There's no doubt about that. What you have to do is try. You'll see that it happens. People are writing to me, and telling me that they're trying this, and that's exactly what's happening. So we don't want to be too cynical about where we might be headed.

"And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael—by tradition, the forefather of several Arab nations and of Mohamed himself. And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram." So that's the end of another story. And then, again, we have an encounter between Abraham and God. "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect." [Alexander Maclaren](#), who was a Biblical commentator, who lived in the early 19th century, said, "this phrase, 'walking before god,' is not precisely walking with God"—that's what Noah did—"it is rather that of an active life, spent in continual consciousness of being naked and opened before the eyes of Him to whom we have to give account."

I was pretty happy to stumble across that. I mean, I might have picked and chosen, of course—you never know whether you do that—but it does seem in keeping with the narrative strain of the chapter, right? What we've hypothesized so far is that God has called to Abraham, and said, 'get out there in the world. Go to where it's unknown; go to where you're a stranger. Get away from the familiar. Establish yourself, and great things will come of it, regardless of the

proximal evidence.' I think that's what the "walking before God" refers to. It's not like Abraham is acting in certainty. There's no certainty, here. That's the leap of faith—because it does require a leap of faith for you to move into the world. The world is, self-evidently, a catastrophe. There's every reason for you to assume that you should sit in your basement, and hide from it. But it doesn't help; it doesn't make things better. The thing is, perhaps you're not built for that. You're not built to hide. I don't think that people are built to hide. I think it destroys them. And so "walking before God," in some sense, means that Abraham is taking the lead: he's the person that's going out there, into the unknown. God says, great things are going to happen, but he's a little short on details. That's for sure. The weight is still on Abraham, and that's a good thing. That ennobles Abraham.

That's the other thing that's so cool: if God had just laid out the whole story, and brushed the branches from Abraham's path while he was walking forward, well, then there'd be nothing for Abraham to do. There'd be no nobility in his own pursuit. This is another thing that we don't understand very well. It's a really tough thing to understand. How much trouble would you want there not to be? It's a weird question, right? You want to have something to contend with. You want to have something that forces from you the best that you have, so you have to have real problems. Something like that. If all your problems were solved, would you just lay down on the bed, and have pabulum infused into your mouth? And so maybe you want difficult problems that you can solve. Something like that.

I don't know what it is about it. There's the overcoming and the growth that comes along with that. There's something about the nobility of the enterprise. You certainly see that when you go about having children, for example. The psychological literature's quite clear: if you do moment-to-moment comparison of people who have kids and people who don't have kids, the people who don't have kids are happier. So psychologists, who tend to get things wrong even when they make intelligent discoveries, like that one, immediately—some of them—jumped to the conclusion that, because happiness is the goal, that there's something about children that make you unhappy, and that's not good. It's like, wait a second. Maybe that's the wrong metric. Of course you're less happy once you have children, because you have to worry about them. My neighbour down the street, who's a very smart woman, said to me once, 'you can only be as happy as your unhappiest child,' which I thought was really good. That's really smart. Well, if having children doesn't make you happy, the answer isn't, don't

have children.

Don't be so stupid about being happy: that's the answer. There's a nobility in the pursuit. Of course, now you're responsible. You have a new baby, and you think—especially if you're a new parent—'what the hell is this, and what am I going to do with it?' And then you're done for the rest of your life. You never sleep properly again, because you're going to be worried about this creature you have to take care of. But what the hell good are you if you're not doing that, or something else equally difficult? You just haven't been called out yet, unless you take on a responsibility like that. The idea that happiness is the purpose of life...It's like, great for happiness. If it comes along, you should be thrilled that it's visiting you. But the notion that that's what you should pursue—that's the weakest possible notion. First of all, as soon as something terrible happens to you, you're done. It's like, 'life is to be happy'—well, now you have cancer. So how's that? How's the happiness thing working out for you, now? Well, maybe it's not you, you know? Maybe it's your father that has alzheimer's disease or some damn thing.

It's a rare person that doesn't have some catastrophe one person away from them. 'Life is to be happy'—that's not right. We can at least derive that from these stories. That isn't what they say, at all. God's perfectly happy, in these stories, to grant the people to whom he forms a covenant happiness and prosperity, but there's never a word that that's the purpose. The rule is, aim high, and get your bloody act together. That's the rule: establish this contractual covenant with the ultimate ideal, and that will see you through the catastrophes. That's a much more mature way of looking at life, as far as I'm concerned. All you have to do is have your eyes half open, and you see that the fundamental reality of life is tragedy and suffering. That's inescapable. That doesn't mean that it makes life unbearable, or that it makes being something that shouldn't have existed. That isn't what it means. It means that you have to contend with it, and you have to get ready. The willingness to adopt responsibility for yourself and for others is the precondition for that. And then, maybe if you do that properly, now and then you get some happiness. You can sit at the end of a day, and you have half an hour where your conscience is clear. There's nothing that you need to be doing, and you can relax and think, 'that's all right; things are ok, and thank God for that.' That's, maybe, where you get your happiness. That's something; that's growing up, man. To not know that...To not be taught that...Everyone should be taught that. It's so obvious. We should be taught that. That's partly what these Biblical stories do.

"And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations."

God says this a lot to Abram. It's almost like he has to remind him now and then. It's not surprising, because he keeps going through these unbelievable adventures that are psychologically and socially shattering. So it's a good thing that this reminder pops up fairly frequently. But, of course, Abraham is also open to it. What does it mean? I'll talk personally, for a moment. So I've asked myself a lot of questions in the last eight months. I can tell you that—and I'm still asking myself a lot of questions. I've been conferring with a lot of people. I've had a lot of people who were helping me negotiate whatever the hell this is that's happening. I could ask them how I was doing, and they would tell me a bunch of things that I was doing wrong, and some things that I was doing right, and I could listen to them. I was asking questions all the time about how the hell I should manage this properly. What I was trying to do, and what seemed to serve me properly, was to figure out how to do it correctly. That was the issue. I didn't really care what happened, and I guess I really don't care what happens. But I do care if I do it correctly. I don't want to screw it up. I don't want to screw things up. That seems to be a reasonable goal for people. Wouldn't you like that as a goal, that you don't screw things up? Your life isn't fully under your control, by any stretch of the imagination, but it might be nice to not have your conscience eating at you, saying, 'look, you had a big opportunity, there, and you mucked it up, because you're weak and blind, and you didn't listen.'

That's no good. The catastrophe's bad enough, as I said, without you being the bloody source of it. Well, that's Abram falling on his face, I guess, and also communing with God. He wants to get it right. There are things that beckon and promise, but it's bloody easy to make a catastrophic mistake, and you'll do that in your life, and maybe humility is one of the things that can prevent that. You can look, and you can think, 'ok, what am I doing wrong? What could I do better? How could I do this properly?' 'And then, maybe, you get the intimation of the proper way to move forward, and maybe that's what protects you when things are chaotic and in strife. Who knows what that's worth?

"Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram"—which means 'high king,' if I remember correctly—"but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee." Oh, yes—"Abram: high father." Abraham means "father of a multitude." "And I will make thee exceedingly fruitful, and I will

father of a multitude. And I will make thee exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of thee." Productive, right? That seems to be something that's good to be.

I've thought deeply about death, the death of my family members, and about funerals. I thought about it partly because I had this weird experience, once, that I think I told you about, where I took one of my clients to see an embalming, which was a very strange experience. I had a chance to talk to the funeral directors. They have weird jobs. There's this Freudian idea that people suffer from terrible death anxiety. There's a whole line of social psychological theorizing called [terror management theory](#), that's predicated on the idea that we defend ourselves against death anxiety with our belief systems. It's [Ernest Becker's](#) idea. He wrote [The Denial of Death](#), which is a great book. But there's a weakness in it. You see some people who aren't like that: emergency room nurses aren't like that, and palliative care nurses aren't like that. My sister-in-law is a palliative care nurse. That's a hard job. You go in there, you're caring for people, and they're in pain, and they're on their last legs. You're trying to make them comfortable, and you have a relationship with them, because how the hell are you going to make them comfortable if you don't? And then they go and die on you, and that just happens every day.

What's weird is that people can be palliative care nurses. It's like, how do you figure that out? People can actually thrive in the face of death, strangely enough. These funeral parlor directors, they were interesting to talk to, because that's all they do, right? They just deal with death and grief all the time. It was very interesting, talking to them. I talked to two of them. They found their job extremely meaningful. I asked them, 'well, what does that do to your life? You're saturated with death and suffering.' This is the same answer that I got from palliative care nurses: 'it doesn't undermine your life; it enriches it.' Who would guess that? What the hell? That just doesn't make any sense, at all. But what it does is speak to human possibility. God only knows how tough you are. If you read history, and you read about what people have done, you think, 'wow; we're pretty tough.'

There's a shipwreck in Antarctica, from 100 years ago or so. I read the story. It's not a biography, if I remember correctly, of the captain. I might be wrong about that, but I've got the basic story right. Well, they had a shipwreck in Antarctica, and they were there for a whole year, in Antarctica, and none of them died. Not one. He didn't lose a single man. Not one. He kept the morale high. They took this boat that was on the ship, and they crossed like 400 miles of the roughest



ocean—the roughest, frigid ocean in the world. You don't go in that ocean. And then they went to an island, and they walked across the island, across these mountains, that no one else has ever climbed since. They went to the city on the other side of the island, and they got a boat, and they went and rescued their compatriots, and everyone survived.

[Endurance](#) is the name of the book. Read that book, man. You'll think, 'wow! People are really tough!' It's ridiculous. So who knows how tough you are? Maybe you find out by going out to find out how tough you are—you take on a challenge, one that you think you can master. It's just a bit beyond your grasp. You master it, and then you're a little tougher, and you think, 'hey, that worked out pretty well.' So then you're more of a monster, and then you go out, and you find another challenge, that's even bigger, and you think, 'maybe I can do that, too.' All of a sudden you can, and you get a little bit bigger. God only knows what the limits are of you. You find out by pushing yourself against the world. Of course, that's what Abraham is doing.

We're very pessimistic, us modern people. We're pessimistic about humanity. That's for sure. Dismal, wretched, planet-destroying, cancer on the planet, right? As the [Club of Rome](#) described us so pleasantly back in the 1960s. I don't know; maybe we're ashamed of the Cold War. Maybe we're ashamed of all the destruction in the 20th century, and the hydrogen bomb, and the continuing catastrophes of our societies. We're deeply ashamed of that, and ashamed of ourselves, personally. But it's a hell of a thing to call us a cancer on the planet. There's just no excuse for that, because what you do with cancer is eradicate it. I don't think that's a very noble motive, personally. I think it says a lot about the people who would use such phraseology, that they would dare conceptualize humanity in that manner.

It would be nice if we could be optimistic. The problem with being optimistic is it's naive. So then the question is, is there an optimism that's not naive? I think there is. The optimism that's not naive is just a visualization of how strong people can be. One of the things that I tell people—I told my students, in my class, in Maps of Meaning—here's a goal: be the person at the funeral of your father that everyone can rely on. How would that be? Or do you want to be the person who's broken, useless, and adding to the misery, in the corner? I'm not making light of people's grief. I understand grief. But who do you want to be when there's a crisis? Do you want to be the person that everyone can turn to for strength? Why the hell not? Why not that as a goal? That'd be a good goal, because then, if there's a crisis—and there will be—it won't be such a bloody

because then, if there's a crisis—and there will be—it won't be such a bloody crisis: there will be someone there who can deal with it.

When I went and talked to these people at the funeral home, I envisioned that. I thought, 'ok, well, this is something you have to contend with, if you're going to be alive and adult.' You have to contend with death and suffering, and you have to be ready for it. You have to be there for the person. That's all they're going to have. There's a goal, man. In this time of nihilism, what's the point of life? People ask. They're taught that at universities: 'What's the point of life? Everything's interpretation. Humanity is a cancer on the planet.' Well, how about no? How about not that? How about that there's something to us?

"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan"—because, of course, Abraham went out into the land of strangers. But it says that, if he keeps his covenant, he'll master the land of strangers. That's a wonderful thing to know, and, I think, a true thing.

I've dealt with lots of strange people in my life. I'm a clinical psychologist. That isn't to say that everyone that I've dealt with was strange, because that's not the case. But I have encountered some very strange people. The way to deal with strange people is to—you never lie to a strange person, especially if they're paranoid. You never lie to someone who's paranoid. It will come back to bite you. If you're in an extreme situation with someone who's very unpredictable, the only thing you have that works is the truth. That works.

I'll tell you a little story. This is in my book. So I had this landlord in Montreal. He lived next door to me. He was an ex-Hell's Angels biker. He'd spent a lot of time in prison. His wife had borderline personality disorder. She committed suicide when I lived there. He was a rough guy. He was Quebecois. He spoke [Joual](#), which I could hardly understand. He didn't really know what to make of me, and I didn't really know what to make of him, but we got along. I was very careful talking to him, as you might imagine. My wife and I went over there, and we had spaghetti dinner one night, and we sort of communicated, and I bought a poster from him. He made these wooden posters that had neon on them. That's how he made a living: he kind of trained himself to be a bit of an electronics guy. So he made these things.

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He was trying to quit drinking, and we talked about that. He was a lot older than me, by about 20 years. I was about 25, at this point. We got along pretty well. But, every now and then, he'd go out and drink, and he could really drink. He was one of these guys who could drink like 60 beer. And you think, 'well, no one can drink that much,' and you're wrong. I studied alcohol for like 10 years. Some of my subject's fathers drank 40 ounces of vodka a day, and had been doing it for 20 years. So you can drink a lot, and he could drink a lot. He was trying to not drink, but he'd go out, and go on a binge, and then he'd be gone for like three days. He'd drink up all his money, and then we'd hear him out in the backyard, howling at the moon with this little ugly dog he had. He'd howl, and the dog would howl, and he'd howl, and the dog would howl. It was rather unsettling. It made my wife nervous. But, worse, now and then he'd come to the door, at like three in the morning. He'd knock on the door, and he'd be standing there...I don't know how much experience you've had with rough guys who were alcoholic and drunk. They can be upright and unconscious at the same time. That was the state that he was in: he'd be just swaying. He'd ask me if I would like to buy his toaster or his microwave, because he needed some money to keep drinking. I didn't really want to buy his toaster or his microwave, but when the ex-Hell's Angel, Joul speaking, 60 beer-drunk Quebecois biker shows up at your door at three in the morning and offers to sell you his microwave, the easiest thing is to say, 'I really need a microwave.' Hah.

So I bought the microwave, toaster, and some other things. But then my wife talked to me. She liked my landlord. Even though she was afraid of him, she liked him. She said, 'you can't buy any more appliances. It's not good for him.' I thought, 'huh. That's an interesting problem. So what the hell am I going to do about this? No, I don't want to buy your microwave, doesn't seem to be the right way to answer, at three in the morning.' One time he took me out on his 750 Honda, and he put me on the back of it. He wanted to show me his lair, I guess—his hangout. I got his wife's helmet on, but it didn't fit. It just sat on the top of my head. I got on the bike, and he said, 'if the cops chase us, we're not stopping.' Hah. And then away we went. We went to these bars, downtown, on Saint-Laurent. They were very rough places. He got into like four fights that night.

He was a rough guy. These kind of punk guys would come up to him, and sort of challenge him, and act stupidly around him. He was very sceptical, and if you were acting stupidly around him for any length of time, he'd just hit you, because he felt that's what you deserved, and perhaps he was right. So I had a firsthand opportunity to observe him. So anyways. sure enough. about a week or

...and opportunity to observe him in any way, but enough, about a week or two after we had this conversation, he showed up at the door. Knock, knock, knock. I opened the door, and he was standing there, with his eyes kind of half closed. He was swaying. He had—I don't remember what the appliance was, this time, but he wanted to sell it to me. I said, 'Paul, I can't buy this. I'm not going to buy this, because I know you're trying to quit drinking. If I give you this money, then you're going to go and drink it up. It's not going to be good for you...' What else did I tell him? I think I told him, as well, that this whole thing of him coming to my house at like two in the morning was scaring my wife, who he liked, and that it had to stop. Believe me, man, I was thinking about what I was saying. He was watching me like a rough guy watches you. A rough guy watches you like this: he thinks, 'if you say one thing that indicates contempt, you're going to bloody well pay for it.' So I was finding my words like I was crossing a swamp, and trying to look for the rocks underneath the surface. I said what I had to say very, very carefully. He looked at me for about 15 seconds, and that's a long time to be looked at, at three in the morning. He left, and he never came back to sell me anything again, and we got along fine.

That's a good illustration of this issue with regards to truth and success in a strange land. I was in a strange land when I was talking to my neighbour, my landlord. I managed to say what was true carefully enough so that, despite the fact that he was a very violent person, and that he was a very intoxicated person, and that he had every reason to be suspicious of me, and we couldn't communicate very well, and I didn't do what he wanted, he took it, and he left, and there was no problem, and life went on just fine after that. So we don't want to underestimate the utility of establishing this bounded relationship with the ideal, and attempting to live with some nobility, in truth, while aiming at the highest ideal. Nothing about that is anything but strengthening and positive. It's exactly what you need to set against the catastrophe and uncertainty of life. As far as I can tell, that's what these Abrahamic stories are attempting to communicate. So we'll stop there. Thank you.

## **XI: Sodom and Gomorrah**

Three difficult stories, tonight. My plan is to get through all three of them. So we'll see how that goes. We're going to talk about the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, and then the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, which is an extremely complicated story. So we'll try to make some headway with that. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is plenty complicated, too.

All right, so what we established last week, at least in part, was this idea that the Abrahamic narratives are set up as punctuated epochs in Abraham's life. We were hypothesizing that you set out a goal for yourself, in your life—it's like a stage in your life. You might say that. And then, when you run that goal to its end, when that stage comes to an end, then you have to regroup and orient yourself once again. I was making the case that that's a good time to make necessary sacrifices. Part of that's because, as you move through your life, you have to shed that which is no longer necessary. Otherwise it accretes around you, holds you down, and you perish sooner than you should. I think that's in large part because, if you don't dispense with your life as you move through it, then the stress of all that undone business, and of all those unmade decisions turns into a kind of chaos around you. That chaos puts you in a state of psychophysiological emergency preparedness, chronically, and that just ages you.

It's necessary, in some sense, to stay light on your feet, and also, I think, to renew your commitment to your aim upward. I believe that's what the sacrifice routines in the Abrahamic stories dramatize. I said, already, that these things are often first portrayed very dramatically and concretely before they become psychologized. We'll see, because one of the things that happens is that, when God makes his covenant with Abraham—this is the next part of the story—it's also when the idea of circumcision is introduced into ancient Hebrew culture. Now, there's every bit of evidence that other cultures were utilizing circumcision beforehand, so it wasn't necessarily a novel invention of the Abrahamic people. But I see its introduction as a step on the road to the psychologization of the idea of sacrifice. First of all, it's giving up something concrete. Second, it's signified by the sacrifice of a part of the body for the sake of the whole. It's something like that. It's dramatizing the idea that you have to give up a part of yourself for the sake of the whole, and eventually, well, by modern times, that becomes virtually completely psychological in its essence, in that we all understand—

perhaps not as well as we should, but at least well enough to explain it—that it's necessary to make sacrifices, to move ahead in life.

One of the themes that I'd like to explore tonight, especially in relationship to the sacrifice of Isaac, is that once humanity had established the idea that sacrifice was necessary to move ahead—which is, really, a discovery of incalculable magnitude: the idea that you can give up something in the present and that will, in some sense, ensure a better future. It's an unbelievable achievement. It's the equivalent of the discovery of the future. It's the equivalent of the discovery of the utility of work. Its importance can't be overstated. It took a long time for people to figure this out. Animals haven't figured it out, at all. We've figured it out, and it's hard for people to make sacrifices, because, of course, the present has a major grip on you, as it should, because, in some way, you live in the present.

So anyways, there's the twin problem of getting the whole idea of sacrifice up and running, and then figuring out exactly what it means. But there's a twofold problem that branches off that. The hypothesis is that sacrifice is necessary to ensure that the future is safe, secure, productive, positive, and all of those things. Ok. Two questions immediately rise from that. One is, well, what's the proper sacrifice? Now, we already talked about that a little bit in regards to Cain and Abel. One of the things we saw was that Cain's sacrifice, whatever it was, was wrong, and Abel's was right. Noah's seemed to be right. Abraham's seemed to be right. There is something about a sacrifice that can be correct. There's something about a sacrifice that can be incorrect. The question is, what would be the maximally correct sacrifice? That's an obvious question to arise from the mere observation that sacrifice is necessary. If you're going to sacrifice, and it's necessary, well, how is it that you would behave if you were going to do it really well, if you were going to do it perfectly? Ok, so that's question number one.

Question number two might be, well, if the future can be better because of a sacrifice, and sacrifices can vary in quality, then how much better could the future be if your sacrifice was of the highest quality? There's a limit issue, there. The limit is something like, well, how good could your life be if you really got your act together and gave up all the things that were impeding you in your movement forward? If you did that forthrightly and with integrity and dead seriousness, and you tried to set your life right, what is the upper limits with regards to how your life might lay itself out? I would say, well, we don't know the answer to that, but I think that the idea of something like the city or kingdom of God on earth. or the reestablishment of paradise. is the answer of the

imagination to the question: how good could the future be if sacrifice was optimized? Those are archetypal questions. An archetypal question is a question that everyone asks, whether they know it or not. Sometimes you can act out a question. An archetypal question is a question that everyone asks, and an archetypal answer is the answer that can't be made any better to that question. I can give you an example of that. The reason that Christ's passion is an archetypal story is because it's a kind of limit. It's the worst possible set of things that can happen to the best possible person. So it's a story that constitutes a limit. It has nothing to do with the factual reality of the story. That's a completely independent issue. I'm speaking about this psychologically. Certain stories can exhaust themselves in a perfect form—that would be the archetypal form. So that's the territory that we're going to wander around in a little bit today. We'll use the stories as anchors.

I've been thinking a lot about the Sodom and Gomorrah story, because it's classically associated with the Biblical injunction against homosexuality, and that's often how it's read, in particular by the more fundamentalist end of the Christian spectrum. I've thought about that a lot. It's pretty damn clear that the story of Sodom and Gomorrah has something to do with sexual impropriety, but I've really come to the conclusion that it has very little to do with homosexuality. So we'll see how that interpretation prevails, as we walk through this tonight. Ok, so we'll start with a bit of a recap from last week. Abraham's had his last adventure. He's 99 years old.

"...the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect." Well, that's quite the command. [Alexander MacLaren](#), who we talked about before, elaborated upon this slightly. This is what he had to say: "It is not precisely walked with God; It is rather that of an active life, spent in continual consciousness of being naked and opened before the eyes of Him to whom we have to give account."

Ok, so that's an idea that's in keeping with the notion that what we're seeing in the Abrahamic story is the call to adventure of the typical person. Your life, in some sense, is an adventure. I suppose the reason for that is that you're confronted by things that you cannot understand, that you have not yet mastered; there's a heavy price to be paid if you fail to conduct yourself appropriately, and there's a large reward to be gained if you conduct yourself properly. That pretty much defines an adventure story.

God calls to Abraham and tells him to move out into the world, to leave what he

GOD CALLS TO ABRAHAM and tells him to move out into the world, to leave what he is familiar with, to go into the strange lands of famine and tyranny, and to find his place. That works out quite nicely for Abraham. What that also means is that, because Abraham was doing that consciously—at least according to this interpretation—he's not naive in his determination to move forward. I've dealt with lots of people who have anxiety disorders. They are not mysterious to me. It's no problem for me to understand why people have anxiety disorders, or why they're depressed, or why they have substance use problems. The mystery to me is always why people don't have all of those things at once. Everybody has a reason to be anxious. In fact, we have the ultimate reason to be anxious: we know that we're vulnerable, and we know that we're going to die. How you can not be anxious under those circumstances is a great mystery. It's a massive mystery. The same thing applies with regards to depression, and then the same thing applies, to some degree, to drug and alcohol abuse. As I said last week, there's plenty of reasons to drown your consciousness in alcohol. That's for sure. We could refer to the aforementioned anxiety and depression, not least. The sorts of drugs that people are prone to take are chemicals that take the affective edge off the tragedy of life.

Back to the issue of fear. Abraham is self-conscious. That's what this commentary says. But the thing is, he moves forward despite that. He's self-conscious, and he knows the dangers, but he moves forward despite that. That's actually the appropriate response in the face of an actual, non-naive understanding of what constitutes life. If you're naive and you move forward, it's like, well, what the hell do you know? There's no courage in naivety because you don't know what there is to stop you, and you don't know what dangers you might apprehend. But to be aware of what it is that your problem is—so to be alert existentially, let's say, or to be fully self-conscious—means that you're perfectly aware of your limitations and how you might be hurt. And then to make the decision to move forward into the unknown and the land of the stranger anyways... That's one of the secrets to a good life. I can say that, really, without fear of contradiction, because the clinical literature on this is very, very clear.

What you do with people who are afraid—and, to some degree, depressed, but certainly anxious—is you lay out what they are anxious about, first of all, in detail. What is it you're afraid of? What might happen? And then you decompose it into small, hypothetically manageable problems, and then you have the person expose themselves to the thing that they're afraid of. What happens isn't that they get afraid. That isn't what the clinical literature indicates.



exactly. What happens instead is that they get braver. That's not the same thing, right? Because if you get less afraid, it's like, 'well, the world isn't as dangerous as I thought it was. Silly me.' If you get braver, that's not what happens. What happens is, 'the damn world's just as dangerous as I thought, or maybe it's even more dangerous than I thought, but it turns out that there's something in me that responds to taking that on as a voluntary challenge, and grows and thrives as a consequence.'

There's no doubt about this. Even the psychophysiological findings are quite clear. If you impose a stresser on two groups of people, and on one group the stresser is imposed involuntary, and on the other group the stresser is picked up voluntarily, the people who pick up the stresser voluntarily use a whole different psychophysiological system to deal with it: they use the system that's associated with approach and challenge, and not the system that's associated with defensive aggression and withdrawal. The system that is associated with challenge is much more associated with positive emotion and much less associated with negative emotion. It's also much less hard on you. The defensive posturing system, the prey animal system—man, when that thing kicks in, it's all systems are go for you. The pedal's pushed down to the metal, and the brakes are on. You're using future resources that you could be storing for future time right now, in the present, to ready yourself for emergency.

There's nothing simple or trivial, at all, about the idea of being called to move forthrightly forward into the strange and unknown. There's some real adventure that's associated with that. That's an exciting thing, which is part of the reason why people travel. And then also to see yourself as the sort of creature that can do that, is willing to do that on a habitual basis, is also the right kind of tonic for—I hate this word—your self-esteem. The self-esteem has nothing to do with feeling good about yourself. As I already mentioned, there isn't necessarily reason why, a priori, you should just feel good about yourself. But if you can view yourself acting in a courageous and forthright manner, and encountering the world, and trying to improve your lot, and taking risks in the non-naive way, well, you have something that you can comfort yourself with at night when you're wondering what the whole damn point is of your futile and miserable life. That's necessary, because it's sometimes the case that you wake up at four in the morning when things haven't been going that well and wonder just what the hell the point is of your futile and miserable life. You have to have something real to set against that. It can't just be rationalizations about how you're a valuable person among others. Even though that's true, that's not good enough. You need

something that's more realistic to set against that. Observing courage in yourself is definitely one of the things that can help you sleep soundly at night when things are destabilized a little bit around you.

Back to the covenant. God tells Abraham, "I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee." Abram means high father, and Abraham means father of a multitude. "And I will make thee exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

I love the line about the land where you're a stranger. Almost everything that happens in these more archaic stories is laid out geographically. The metaphor is geographic. So you move to a land that you haven't yet occupied, maybe that's full of strangers, and then the land is what's granted to you. But it's perfectly reasonable to think about this from a more abstract perspective, and from a perspective that's much more relevant to modern people, with our incredibly complex societies.

It's definitely the case that, if you go into the land of the stranger, which is exactly what you do when you try out any new endeavour—when you start a new job, or when you start a new educational enterprise, or when you start a new relationship. It doesn't matter; you're in unexplored territory. The physical geography is the same, but we don't live in the spatial world, only. We live in the temporal, spatial world. What that means is that the same place can be different at a different time. It can be completely different. And so if you're in your house but you have a new person in your house, well, your house is new, for all intents and purposes. The territory surrounding that new person is the territory of the foreigner, essentially. The same things happen to you when you start a new job. You'll find that, when you start a new job, especially if you stretched yourself a little bit beyond your zone of comfort, that you very much feel like an imposter, when you're first there. And then the question is, well, how do you master that? The answer to that seems to be fairly straightforward: if the place that you're in has any degree of possibility—if it isn't inhabited by

place that you're in has any degree of probability that you're threatened by demons, so to speak—the best way to act is to lift your aim upward, attempt to get your act together, tell the truth, live a meaningful life, and to do difficult things. All of that. That is the best way of mastering a new territory. In all probability, the degree to which you're able to act that out is precisely proportionate to the degree to which you're going to be become a master in that territory. That sort of thing can happen a lot faster than people think.

It's really quite remarkable how fast you can move forward if you can establish yourself somewhere and prove yourself useful, assuming that you're around people to whom proving yourself useful actually matters. I know perfectly well that you can end up in an employment situation where you're punished for your virtues, in which case you should just get the hell out of there. Really, you get out of there, and you go find somewhere that, if you work hard and do what you're supposed to do, you're actually going to be rewarded. Otherwise, that's not a workplace; that's hell, and you should just leave there.

"And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised."

That's a mystery, there. Why that particular rite? Well, it's dramatic. It certainly effects a man where he's most concerned to be effected. It's something like that. So it's a sacrifice that has, I would say, a certain degree of unforgettability. That would be the first thing. And a certain degree of pain and threat that goes along with it. So it's not nothing. That's the thing.

Now, you can argue—and I think there is a case to be made about whether or not, in the modern world, circumcision is something reasonable to inflict on infants. I don't want to have that conversation, at all. But I don't think that's relevant to this particular issue because we're talking about something different. We're talking about humanity's attempt to reconcile themselves to the fact that something has to be given up in order for something else to happen, and to really try to work through that idea, and to make it into a psychological reality. So far, what we've seen in the Biblical stories is that, when you make a sacrifice, it's not really something personal or psychological, right? It's something external and dramatic. You give up something that you own. You don't give up something that you are, or that's part of you. It's actually more of a sacrifice to give up something that's a part of you, or something that you are, than to give up something that you own. I mean, it's a subtle distinction, because in some cases

something that you own. I mean, it's a subtle distinction, because in some sense, the distinction between what you own and what you are is subtle. It's not overwhelmingly subtle, but people identify with their possessions. They need to, because otherwise they wouldn't care for them. They need their possessions in order to live, so their possessions are, in some sense, integral to them. But this transformation, here, of an act that was external and associated, essentially, with possessions, to something that was at least part of the body, brings it much closer to the individual as a psychological reality. It's something like that.

"And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you."

It's also a permanent marker. I've read a fair bit about practices like tattooing and body scarification. Those are very, very common practices. They're human universals, actually. No matter where you go around the world, you see a couple of things. First of all, almost without exception, people wear clothing. Sometimes it's relatively minimal clothing, and often it's more decorative than protective, but it's almost inevitably clothing. The other thing that you see is that people do scarify and tattoo themselves. They do that, in some manner, to catalyze their identity. They're trying to transform themselves from a generic person, in some sense, to a person that's been designed by their own hand. It's something like that. It's a marker of developing identity, and some of it seems to be catalyzed with pain.

Modern people who tattoo—and I'm not saying that I'm in favour of tattooing, because actually I'm not, but that's my own particular bias, and if you have a tattoo, that's fine with me. I'm also not saying that there's anything wrong with it. But one of the things you do see is that people with a tattoo do report a couple of things: the pain is actually necessary, and that the pain is actually something that seems to establish something like a memory. Well, it's a memory because of the pain, because you bloody well remember things that hurt. But it's also a memory because it's actually etched on you, right? It's not something that you can just abandon and forget. And so a circumcision is exactly the same thing. You don't forget it, because it's part of you. It makes a good token for a covenant. That seems to be the rationale, here, speaking from a psychological perspective. It's to indicate, as well, that the damn thing that's happening is serious. I also think that was the case with the earlier sacrifices of animals.

Modern people don't do this. You don't know how serious you would take a vow if you sacrificed a goat in your backyard. It's actually a very dramatic thing

to do. You think about it as primitive, and perhaps it is primitive and archaic, and no doubt it is. But it's also to take the life of something, and to spill its blood. That's no joke; that's something you remember, especially if you haven't done it before. We actually don't know what we would need to do in order to take something seriously. We all do things like make New Year's resolutions about how we're going to be better people, and we don't do it. The reason for that, at least in part, is because we don't know how to make the sacrifice sufficiently bloody, let's say, so that we remember that it's necessary. We don't take it with seriousness. We don't think, 'I should quit smoking, because I'm going to die.' We don't think through what that means: coughing your lungs out for three months in a hotel bed while your entire family is repulsed, horrified, and sorrow-stricken at the fact that this has happened far too early. We won't make that real enough to make it serious. Without that seriousness, we won't do it. There's something to be said for rituals of seriousness. I think this is one of them.

"And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed." This is from [Charles John Ellicott](#), who was Bishop of Gloucester: "The fitness of circumcision to be a sign of entering into a covenant, and especially into one to which children were to be admitted, consisted in its being a representation of a new birth by the putting off of the old man, and the dedication of the new man unto holiness."

It's like a baptism—that's what's echoed, there. Of course, baptism is a return to the precosmogonic chaos. That's what the water indicates: a return to the source of life, and then the renewal that comes along with it. So it's a sacrificial idea, in some sense, that, if there's to be a new you, the old you has to dissolve—return to the solution from which it emerged initially—and reconstitute itself. So there's an echo of that idea, here.

"The flesh was cast away that the spirit might grow strong; and the change of name in Abram and Sarai was typical of this change of condition. They had been born again, and so must again be named. And though women could not indeed be admitted directly into the covenant, yet they shared in its privileges by virtue of their consanguinity to the men, who were as sponsors for them; and thus Sarai changes her name equally with her husband."

You could make a case—anthropology observers have made this case, too—that women undergo a set of sufficiently radically psychophysiological

women undergo a set of culturally, radically, psychophysiological transformations merely as a consequence of being feminine in nature, such that the additional rituals of transformation that might be necessary for men aren't necessary. One of those might be menstruation, because that's a pretty dramatic transformation. There has been some indication that circumcision is like the male equivalent of menstruation, because of the blood that's involved and because of the locale. Of course, the same thing is the case with women when they give birth. That's a particularly dramatic thing, as I just witnessed, because my daughter just had a baby this week. So thank God for that!

"Recent investigation"—this is from the [Cambridge Bible for School and Colleges](#), which, if you want to read it, is only 58 volumes—"has not tended to support the theory that circumcision has any connexion with primitive child sacrifice; nor, again, that it took its origin from hygienic motives. Apparently, it represents the dedication of the manhood of the people to God. In the history of Israel, it has survived as the symbol of the people belonging to Jehovah through His special election... This corporeal sacrament remained to the Israelite, when every other tie of religion or race had been severed."

The other thing that I read about in relationship to this idea of the multigenerational covenant had something to do with God telling Abraham to include all of the people of his household into this covenant. That really meant that he was establishing a territory of ethics around them, like the ark, except the psychological equivalent of the ark. So it was a spiritual, or psychological, or ethical territory, that everyone who was of that household was required to occupy—or obliged, or perhaps privileged to occupy. There was also an injunction to Abraham with regards to his children, which was that, as he had established a covenant with God, which we could say is something like his decision to aim as high as possible and to live properly as a consequence—it's more than that, but it's something like that—he also was under the supreme moral obligation to share that with the other men in his family, especially his children. And so I think there's also a call, here, to adopting the sacred responsibility in relationship to children, that has to do with ensuring that they understand how to take their place in the world. I think that's definitely very much worth considering, especially given the emphasis in the story of Noah that his generations were perfect. As I said before, it wasn't merely that he had walked with God—that he had perfected his own relationship with the divine, the transcendent. I want to make that concrete, which is a strange thing to do with the transcendent.

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People ask me all the time about what I believe...Of course, that's what I'm trying to explain while I'm talking...And many people, of course, are sceptical about the idea of anything transcendent and eternal. But that can also be addressed from a psychological perspective. I would say, well, if you have an ideal of any sort, how is that not transcendent? It transcends you. That's the first thing, and it doesn't exist in reality: it exists in a place of possibility. Believe me, man: we treat places of possibility as if they're real. People will call on you about your possibility and potential. They'll say to you, 'you're not manifesting your full potential.' And you might say, 'well, what do you mean by 'potential?'' It doesn't exist; it isn't here, now; you can't measure it or weigh it; you can't get a grip on it.' They'll say, 'don't rationalize. You know perfectly well what I mean when I'm talking about your potential, and so does everyone.' That's a metaphysical reality that we'll immediately accept as real, and castigate ourselves for not fulfilling—and others, too, because you're just not happy when the people around you, especially if you love them, don't fulfill their potential. You really feel that something has gone wrong. And so there's a transcendent reality in potential. And then when you hypothesize an ideal that you might pursue—which you always do, if you pursue anything, right? To pursue something means that you don't already have it. You're pursuing something that doesn't exist. You're probably not pursuing something that's worse than what you already have, because why the hell would you pursue it? That's completely counterproductive. In the mere fact of your pursuit, you posit a transcendent reality that you can journey towards, that's more valuable than the reality you have now, that's predicated, in some sense, on something like an eternal truth. It partakes in the ideal.

We have a relationship with the transcendent. You might say, 'well, that doesn't mean that you have to personify the transcendent, say, as Jehovah, God the Father.' But there's also some damn good reasons for doing that. One of the things that I've realized, thinking through this covenant idea, and also the sacrifice idea, is that the idea that the future is a judgemental father is a really, really good idea. You think about what the future is, in part: the future is however the natural world is going to lay itself out over the next endless amount of time. That isn't what I mean. I think more about your future. Now, mostly your future is the future that you're going to negotiate with other people. But there are going to be other people in the future, and some of those people are going to be you in the future, and family members in the future. And so what's happening right now is that, if you make the sacrifices properly, you're actually pleasing that future set of people, and that future set of people is definitely going to come as a judge. That's exactly what it does; that's precisely what it does.

to serve as a judge. That's exactly what it does, that's precisely what it does. You might say, 'well, it was the brilliant imagination of mankind that hypothesized that the best way to think about the social group, including the family but also including you as your future self, was to consider that you live in relationship with a future father who's a judge.' It's like, yes. That's exactly right. Now, is it right, right, or is it psychologically right? Well, it's at least psychologically right.

One of the things I've learned about the Biblical stories is that to say that they're psychologically right doesn't exhaust the ways in which they're right. But it at least gives rational, modern people who are sceptical, and properly so, a better way of getting a grip on them.

"And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant." So it's a serious, contractual relationship. I was thinking about how to understand this, and I remember this old story, which I'm going to read to you, about a monkey. "There's an old and possibly apocryphal story about how to catch a monkey that illustrates this set of ideas very well. First, so goes the story, you have to find a large, narrow-necked jar, just barely wide enough in diameter at the top for a monkey to put its hand inside. Then you have to fill the jar part way with rocks, so it is too heavy for a monkey to carry. Then you have to scatter some treats, attractive to monkeys, near the jar, to attract one, and put some more inside the jar." And so that's the first part of the trick. The second part of the trick is that a monkey comes along and gathers up the treats, and puts his hand in the jar, and grabs the treats that are in there. But it's narrow-necked, so once the monkey puts its hand in there and grabs the goodies, then he can't get his hand out of the damn jar. And so then you can just come along and pick up the monkey. And too bad for the monkey, right? He should have let go of what he had, so that something terrible didn't happen to him. But that isn't what the monkey will do, because he can't sacrifice the part for the whole. There's something about the circumcision story that's about that: sacrificing the part to save the whole.

There's an echo of that in the New Testament, if I remember correctly—I believe this is correct, although it might not be—where Christ tells his disciples to pluck out their eye if it offends them. It seems like a very dramatic piece of advice, but it's partaking of the same idea, which is that, even if it's dear to you, you have to let it go. You seriously have to let it go, because there isn't anything more important than progressing forward. Cheap sympathy, cheap empathy,



cheap nostalgia—none of that is sufficient. None of that will work. The consequences of not putting things together immediately are dire, and there's no time to wait.

"And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be." Sarai means my princess, and Sarah means mother of nations. "And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. And Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old?" He's got a lot of gall, I would say. I mean, here's God, talking to him, and he laughs. But that's ok. He's a courageous guy, and that's what people are like. "And shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee! "And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation."

Now what does this mean? This is a miraculous story, in some sense. What Abraham wants most is to have a son, but it looks like it's pretty much impossible. I think what the story is attempting to indicate is something like, God only knows what will happen to you if you put your house in order—certainly things that you do not currently regard as possible will happen. The more you put your house in order, the more things that you regard as impossible will happen. It might be the case that, if you put your house together sufficiently, things that were of miraculous impossibility would happen to you. There's no way of knowing until you try it. But there's no way of being sure that it's not the case, unless you do try it.

My experience has been that—I don't mean just personally. I mean that the world is a remarkable and mysterious place. The relationship between the nature and structure of the world and your actions is indeterminate. They may be more tightly related than you think. I don't know how to square that with the fact that, well, you're obviously in a mortal body and constrained by all sorts of serious constraints. None of that can be trivially overcome, and I don't really understand how there can be that seriousness of mortal constraint and the infinite potential, that also seems to characterize human beings, all at the same time. But then, I don't really understand anything about the nature of reality. So that's just one

don't really understand anything about the nature of reality. So that's just one more mystery to add to the pile.

"But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year. And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham. And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him." That must have been an interesting conversation. I mean, really. 'This is what God told you to do, eh?' "And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him."

All right, so that's the renewal of the covenant. That's the next part of the story. That's the circumcision story. As I said, it seems to indicate, to me, something about seriousness of intent—something about the responsibility that Abraham determines to take for everyone that's part of his household, the increasing psychological transformation of the idea of sacrifice, the necessity of doing something memorable, and the utility of rekindling the aims of your highest values when you come to the end of an epoch in your life and have to take stock again. You take stock of yourself. That's really what that phrase means: to take stock is to take stock of yourself and to decide, ok, what should move forward in time with me, and what should be let go as if it's deadwood? The more deadwood that you let go of and burn off when you have the opportunity, the less it accretes around you.

Here's something interesting about forest fires. People have been trying to prevent forest fires for a long time, especially that damn bear, Smokey. He's trying to prevent forest fires, because forest fires burn up the forest, and that can't be good. But here's what happens if you don't let forest fires burn: Forests collect a lot of dry branches, because tree branches die and what falls on the forest floor collects. The amount of flammable material keeps increasing with time. That's not so bad if it's wet, but if the amount of flammable material is increasing, and it gets really dry, and then it burns, then you have a real problem. The forest fire can burn so hot that it burns the topsoil right off, in which case you don't have a forest at all anymore: you just have a desert. Lots of trees are evolved to withstand forest fires of a certain intensity, and some won't even

release their seeds unless there's been a fire. And so a little bit of fire at the right time can stop everything from burning to the ground.

That's also a really useful metaphorical insight into the nature of sacrifice. It's also a lot easier to let go of something when you're deciding to let go of it, because you've decided that you're done with that. It's a weak part of you, and it needs to disappear. You do that yourself. It's much better and much easier than it is if it's taken away from you forcibly, in which case you're very much likely to fight it.

There's another interesting thing, here—a motif that runs through the entire Bible. It's a very, very powerful motif. It's partly associated with this idea of walking with or before God. In the New Testament, Christ says something like, 'thy Father's will be done.' He means that will should be done through him. I won't state this exactly right, but it's something like, a lot of what people regard as their own personalities, are proud of about their personalities, aren't their own personalities, at all. They're useless idiosyncrasies that differentiate them trivially from other people. They have no value in and of themselves. They're more like quirks.

I remember, once, I was trying to teach a particularly stubborn student about how to write. She had written a number of essays in university and got universally walloped for them. The reason for that was that she couldn't write—really, at all. She was really, really bad at writing. And so I was sitting down with her, trying to explain to her what she was doing wrong. She was being very annoying about it, very recalcitrant, very, very unwilling to listen. That was a pearls before swine thing. At one point she said, "I can write perfectly well. The university professors just don't like my style," and I could feel my hands creep towards her neck. That'd be funny if it wasn't true, but it was also true. I thought, 'what the hell's with you? You can't even write, and you think you have a style?' Not knowing how to write is not a style. That's the other point. Instead of humbling herself, which was necessary and ok, because she was a new university student—of course you don't know how to write. When were you going to learn? In school? I don't think so. So she had this style issue, and it just didn't go anywhere, at all, in terms of letting things burn off. So she was proud of her insufficiency. That's arrogance. That's not humility: it's self-deception and arrogance, to be proud of your insufficiency. That's a very foolish thing. That means to cling to the parts of you that are dead.

There's this idea that runs through the Bible I think as a whole that Ok I'll

There's this idea that runs through the Bible, I think, as a whole, that... Oh, I'll tell you another little side story. I was reading about Socrates today, and I was reading about Socrates' trial. He was tried by the Athenians for failing to worship the correct Gods, and for corrupting the youth of Athens by teaching them stuff and asking them questions, which is a great way to corrupt people. So he knew the trial was coming, and Athens wasn't a very big place. It only had about 25,000 people. Everybody knew everybody, and everybody knew who the powerful guys were. Everybody, including Socrates, knew that the trial was a warning to get out of town. 'We're going to put you on trial in six months, and the potential penalty is death. Got that?'

So Socrates had a chat with his compatriots. They were contemplating fair means and foul to set up a defense for him, or to leave, so that he could not be tried and put to death. He decided that he wasn't going to do that. He also decided that he wasn't going to even think about his defense. He said why, and this is quite an interesting thing. He told one of his friends that he had this voice in his head—a daemon, a spirit, or something like that—that he always listened to, and that it was one of the reasons that he was different from other people. He always listened to this thing. It didn't tell him what to do, but it told him what not to do. It always told him what not to do. And if it told him not to do something, then he didn't do it. If he was speaking and the little voice came up and said, 'no,' then he shut up and tried to say something else.

He was very emphatic about this. He said that, when he tried to plan to evade the trial—or even to mount his own defense—the voice came up and said, 'no, don't bother with it.' He thought, 'what the hell do you mean by that? There's a trial coming, and I'm going to be put to death.' Well, he eventually concluded that he was an old guy. He was in his 70s, perhaps, and the next 10 years weren't going to be that great for him. Maybe the Gods were giving him a chance to bow out, to put his affairs in order, to say goodbye to everyone, to avoid that last descent into catastrophe, which might have been particularly painful for a philosopher, and to walk off the world on his own terms. Something like that. The point I'm making with that is that Socrates attended to this internal voice, that at least told him what not to do, and then he didn't do it. Of course, Socrates was a very remarkable man, and we still hear about him today. We know that he existed, and all of those things.

Back to the walking with God idea. You create a judge at the same time as you elevate your aim. The new ideal—which is an ideal you, even if it's just an ideal position that you might occupy, even if it's still conceptualized in that concrete

way—becomes a judge, because it's above you. You're terrified of it, maybe. That's why you might be afraid when you go start a new job, right? This thing is above you, and you're terrified of it, and it judges you. That's useful because the judge that you're creating by formulating the ideal tells you what's useless about yourself, and then you can dispense with it. You want to keep doing that, and then every time you make a judge that's more elevated, then there's more useless you that has to be dispensed with. And then, if you create an ultimate judge, which is what the archetypal imagination of humankind has done, say, with the figure of Christ—because if Christ is nothing else, he is at least the archetypal perfect man, and therefore the judge—you have a judge that says, 'get rid of everything about yourself that isn't perfect.' Of course, that's also what God tells Abraham. He says to be perfect—to pick an ideal that's high enough. You can do this.

The thing that's interesting about this, I think, is that you can do it more or less on your own terms. You have to have some collaboration from other people, but you don't have to pick an external idea. You can pick an ideal that fulfills the role of idea for you: you can say, 'ok, well, if things could be set up for me the way I need them to be, and if I could be who I needed to be, what would that look like?' You can figure that out for yourself, and then, instantly, you have a judge. I also think that's part of the reason that people don't do it. Why don't people look up and move ahead? The answer is, well, you start formulating an ideal, and you formulate a judge. It's pretty easy to feel intimidated in the face of your own ideal. That's what happens to Cain versus Abel, for example. Then it's really easy to destroy the ideal instead of trying to pursue it, because then you get rid of the judge. But it's way better to lower the damn judge if it's too much. If your current ambition is crushing you, then maybe you're playing the tyrant to yourself, and you should tap down the conditions—not get rid of them, by any stretch of imagination, but at least put them more reasonably within your grasp. You don't have to leap from point one to point 50 in one leap, right? You can do it incrementally.

I really like this idea. I think it's a profound idea—that the process of recapitulating yourself continually is also a phoenix-like process. You're shedding all those elements of you that are no longer worthy of the pursuits that you're valuing. And then I would say, the idea, here, is that as you do that, you shape yourself evermore precisely into something that can withstand the tragedy of life, and that can act as a beacon to the world. That's the right way of thinking about it—maybe first to your friends, and then to your family. It's a hell of a fine

ambition, and there's no reason that it can't happen. Every one of you knows people who are really bloody useful in a crisis, and people that you admire, right? You could think of all those people that you admire as partial incarnations of the archetypal messiah. That's exactly right. The more that manifests itself in any given person, then the more generally useful and admirable that person is in a multitude of situations. We don't know the limit to that, but people can be unbelievably good for things. It's really something to behold. So that's what God tells Abraham.

The next story is about Abraham and these angels. Angels show up on his doorstep. This is part of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, but as I said, this story is generally read as if it's about homosexuality, but I don't think it is. I think it's about two things, primarily: One is, how do you treat the strange? So the strange is strange things, strange ideas, strange people, and strangers. It's all that. It's that which is not you. It's like the strange lands that God asked Abraham to move out into. How do you interact with the strange? Here's one possible rule: you could say to yourself, 'well, what do I want to make friends with more? Where do I want to be more comfortable? Do I want to be more comfortable with that which I already know?' And so that would be the circumscribed territory that you've already mastered. 'Or do I want to be comfortable with all of those things that I don't know?' The right answer is that you should want to be comfortable with all those things that you don't know, because there's a bloody lot of things that you don't know. If you can be a sojourner among what you don't know, well, then you're so protected, because you're going to go lots of places that you don't know, and you're going to be able to manage it. You want to be that person that can act where they don't know.

What happens with Abraham is that he's at home, and these angels show up. Now, we don't know whether they're angels or men, precisely, because, as this part of the story reads, "And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day." So he's in another visionary state, by all appearances. "And he lifted up his eyes and look, and, lo, three men stood by him."

There's real ambivalence in the story about the men. Are there three men? Are there three angels? Are there two angels and God? It's all mixed up in the story. We won't clarify that; we'll leave it ambiguous. I think the ambiguity's important because you don't know who the stranger is when you encounter him, and it depends on whether you're thinking about it in the normative manner or if

you're thinking about it in a transcendent manner. With each person that you meet, well, they're just a person. That's one way of thinking about it. And then they're the person that you know, or they're the person as they choose to reveal themselves to you. People keep themselves shielded. But they're also something of great metaphysical potential. You might say, 'do I believe that?' And I would say, 'well, yes. You believe it because you expect a lot from people, generally speaking, and are not happy if they betray you.' But more importantly, our entire culture is predicated on the idea that each person has an indefinite, intrinsic worth. I'm not talking about self-esteem. I'm talking about something like the implicit presupposition in our legal structure that, no matter who you are, even if you're a condemned murderer, there's something about you that's of transcendent value, that has to be respected by the law and other people. You might say, 'do I believe that?' The answer to that is, well, you act it out, because you follow the law. It's not an easy thing to pull out of the law. It's kind of the idea that you have intrinsic, natural rights. You don't pull that out of our law, man, without having the whole thing fall down.

I think the whole idea that you have intrinsic, natural rights is predicated on something like the Biblical hypothesis that human beings have a logos nature, that we are involved in the speaking forth of being, and that, as beings who are involved in the speaking forth of being, there's something about us that has to be respected in relationship to ourselves, by ourselves in relationship to other people, but even more strangely, by ourselves in relationship even to vicious criminals. You can't remove that transcendent element. To me, that's also a miracle of conceptualization, because who the hell's going to think that up, right? Even the most vicious of murderers has a touch of the transcendent that needs to be respected. Of all the ideas that are unlikely, that's gotta top the list. Of course, without that, you have a very barbaric legal system, because no one is protected—as soon as you make a mistake, then you're in the damned, and you have no rights, whatsoever. That isn't what happens in the West, which is an absolutely amazing thing.

So anyways, Abraham is a master of the stranger. That's one way of thinking about it. He knows what to do when strangers come along: he opens himself up to them. We know he's not a naive guy. He's no weakling. A couple of stories ago he took a big army, harassed a bunch of kings, and took his nephew back. He's a tough guy. And so if strangers show up and he welcomes them, it's not because he couldn't do otherwise. He could certainly do otherwise. And it's not that he isn't aware of what people can be like; he's perfectly aware of what

people can be like. But he determines to take a particular attitude towards them, and that is to welcome them. Why would you do that? I think the answer to that is that you hold out your hand in trust to someone and you evoke the best from them, if that's there to be given. So it's an act of courage. It isn't me meeting you, exactly. It's more like the transcendent part of me making a gesture that allows the transcendent part of you to step forward. That happens all the time in normative discourse. You know this perfectly well. Sometimes you can have a real casual conversation with someone that just goes nowhere. It's just shallow as can be. Or, now and then, you can actually make contact with someone, and you're both enlightened and ennobled by the conversation. We would call that a deep conversation because we made a deep connection, whatever that means. Well, it certainly means that it's not shallow. We're not sure what these metaphors mean, but it means that it reaches deep inside of you. You make direct, person-to-person contact. Those sorts of conversations are replenishing. That's the right way to think about it. They genuinely are, and I think that's because they provide you with that bread that's not material bread. That's the information that you need to thrive and put yourself together.

So it does matter how you meet someone, and it does matter how you treat them when you first meet them. It's amazing—I've learned to do this, at least in part, partly because I'm a clinical psychologist. I've learned how to talk to people very rapidly, and I have the most amazing adventures with people in cabs and when I travel, because I'll talk to them directly, right away. They'll tell me the wildest stories and show me the craziest things because I'm actually interested in what they have to say, and I'm not afraid...Well, I'm somewhat afraid, but I'm not sufficiently afraid to have that stop me. I'm acting on the presupposition that the person has something of great interest to reveal. That's a very useful thing to know, too, because one of the things that's really cool about people—and you really learn this as a clinical psychologist—is that, if you get people talking, they're so damn interesting that you could hardly stand it. They have these idiosyncratic experiences that are only theirs, personally. No one else could tell the story, and that's the kind of story that you want to hear. When they tell you those stories, you learn something you didn't know. And so what that means is that you can treat the landscape of strangers as an endless vista of places to learn things you didn't know. If you know enough so that you're satisfied with your life, and everything has ceased to be a tragedy around you, well, then you can be comfortable in your circumscribed domain of totalitarian knowledge, let's say. But if your life is insufficient, and you're suffering more than you want to, and everything isn't what it should be, then you need to look where you haven't looked for what you don't have. And then you can look outside, beyond you, and



looked for what you don't have. And then you can look outside, beyond you, and make friends with what you don't understand.

That's a huge part of what this story's about. What happens is that Abraham welcomes the men, God, angels, and treats them very well, and reaps a tremendous benefit as a consequence. Then the story reverses and we end up in Sodom and Gomorrah, where the same angels sojourn. They're treated terribly, and all hell breaks loose. So that's what the story's about. Now, there's a sexual impropriety thing going on that I'm also going to delve into, but I don't think that's the critical issue in the story. The critical issue in the story is, how do you act in the face of the stranger? There's a statement in the New Testament: Christ says something like, 'when you do something to the least of people, you do it to me.' That's a very difficult statement to understand, too. It's something reminiscent of the requirement to keep the idea of the transcendent reality of the person in mind at the same time you keep their proximal reality in mind—to have your mind in two places at the same time when you're talking to people.

I learned from a friend of mine in Montreal, who's very socially sophisticated, in some ways. I always liked going shopping with him. Whenever he went into a store, the first thing he would do is have an interaction with the clerk. He wouldn't have an interaction with the role of the clerk. He'd look at the person, sort of take stock of the fact that they were there, and then ask them something genuine about their job or their store, or how they were doing—go into a conversation right away. He didn't get personal about it, because that can be intrusive. You have to be very sophisticated to do this. He did indicate to the person that he was there, at least in part, for the good that could be done between them. It's something like that. And then the person would be ridiculously helpful. If people mistreat you—you see this with antisocial kids. It's a very tragic thing to see, because if you're an antisocial child by the time you're about four, you're very hostile and distrustful to people. So you're like a growling puppy. If you're a growling puppy, you tend not to get petted. You're more likely to get kicked. And if you're a growling puppy and you get kicked, you have even more reason to growl. That's sort of the story of antisocial kids: if they're not well socialized by the time they're four and they're more on the aggressive side, then they alienate themselves from the community, and all they get is rejection. Then they look at the rejection and think, 'to hell with humanity.' And no wonder they think that. Part of the catastrophe is that they get what they evoke. I'm not saying it's their fault, precisely, but it doesn't matter. That's still what happens. And so you might ask yourself, if you're not getting from people what you need, there is some possibility that you're not approaching

—especially if this happens to you repeatedly across people. This is a virtual certainty: if it happens to you repeatedly across people, especially if you have the same bad experience with people, it's not them: it's you. I would say three is the limit. If something happens to you once, you write it off. If it happens to you twice, you open your eyes, but you write it off. But if it happens to you three times, it's probably you, or it's the rest of the world. Better it's you, because you're not going to change the rest of the world.

"And he lifted up his eyes and look, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet"—take your dust from your feet, extract yourself out from your journey, and sit. "And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said. And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth." Powerful call to hospitality, here. "And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetcht a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat." Some commentary from Hebrews 13:2: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." This is a commentary from [Matthew Henry](#), who's a nonconformist minister and author. "Cheerful and obliging manners in showing kindness, are great ornaments to piety." This is from Revelations 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, an open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

The hyperlinked nature of those quotes is quite obvious. There's 10 or 15 things being said at the same time, right? One is a reference to the idea that, if you ask for something, it will be given to you. It's a very strange idea, but I like that idea a lot. In my experience, that has been true, if it was that I wanted what I was asking for, because that's the real issue. The question is, if you want something, what does it mean to want it? What it means is to sacrifice whatever is necessary to get it. Otherwise, you don't want it. And so there's an equation, here. I'm not claiming its ultimate accuracy, but the equation is something like, you don't want it unless you're willing to sacrifice for it. And if you don't want it, you're not going to get it, because you're scattered. But if you do want it, and you make

the proper sacrifices, then God only knows what might happen.

One of the things I really like about the existential philosophers is their emphasis on personal responsibility. Many of them had an emphasis on the role that people had in shaping their own destiny. For the existentialists—and I think this was a consequence of the religious substructure of philosophical thinking—it was self-evident that life was tragic and bitter. And fair enough, but that isn't where it ended. The next issue was, well, there are better and worse ways of dealing with that. The better way of dealing with the fact that life is tragic and bitter is to posit the self you could be and live authentically in relationship to that. And then the next issue—this is something [Kierkegaard](#) talked about, particularly when he talked about the necessity of being a knight of faith—is that...I think this is the part of life that's the intractable adventure. No one can take the adventure of life away from you. They can't do it with good advice, for example, because no one can demonstrate to you that, if you straighten yourself out, aim at what you want and make the proper sacrifices, that your life will turn out in the manner that you might want it to turn out. It isn't in anyone else's purview to make that judgement. The only person that can possibly figure that out is you. It's something that can't be stolen from you. I would say it's your destiny. You can forgo it. You could say, 'well, I'm not willing to put in the effort, because what if I fail?' Well, first of all, if you don't put in the effort, you will fail, because life is hard and it takes everything out of you to do it properly. So you will fail. And if you make the proper sacrifices, you might fail. That's why I like the ambiguity in the story of Cain and Abel: we're never really told why God rejects Cain's offering. There's hints that Cain, maybe, isn't doing as good a job as he should, and he certainly gets bitter about it, but there's no smoking pistol. It doesn't say, 'well, Cain is a bad guy, and he made terrible sacrifices, so God rejected him.' You never know. Cain might have been working pretty damn hard, and things still didn't work out for him. I think that ambiguity is appropriate in the story because that ambiguity is in life. You'd be a fool to say that everything always works out for everyone if they just do things right. I think that's a very careless thing to say, given how much tragedy and catastrophe there is in the world, and how much of it seems to be undeserved. But that still has very little bearing, I think, on your own individual adventure and the necessity for opening the door to who you could be, and the necessity to do that seriously.

I think the reason why this most impossible of verses, "knock and the door will open," is believable is because I have never met anyone who couldn't hypnotize a better them in some manner. All they had to do was ask. It's like.

...my performance a better than in some manner that they had to do was about it. Well, how could you be better? It's no problem, right? You can think about that in no time flat—maybe in small ways, but you can almost always at least think of something stupid that you're doing that you could quit. And so that means that you do have this—it's a strange thing in people that we have this built-in capacity to posit a higher self and then move towards it. Maybe that's part of where the religious instinct really came from, speaking really reductionistically, as a materialist, as an evolutionary psychologist. We have this notion of the transcendent ideal that seems to be pervasive across cultures. Maybe that's the ultimate manifestation of the human proclivity to be able to posit an ideal, at all, and to move forward.

You posit an ideal. Ok. You need that to move forward. Well, if you can posit an ideal, why can't you posit the ultimate ideal? Well, if you can, then, instantly, you've got a religious sensibility. I'm puzzled as a biologist: what the hell's the basis of the religious instinct? The idea that it's mere superstition... We can just dispense with that. That's wrong. It's a human universal, and you can evoke religious experiences in all sorts of ways. So we're not going to play that game. There's some reason why that instinct exists. The first thing to do is to try to reduce it to something that's biological, and leave it at that, and not to mess with the metaphysics. But it certainly could be the case that it's the ultimate extension of our capacity to posit an ideal. We also might say, well, that's good enough. The ideal moves you forward; it fills your life with meaning. There's no doubt about that, because it is in the movement towards your ideal that life's meaning is to be attained. And then the question is, well, how much meaning is there in moving towards an ultimate ideal? Well, more meaning, even if it's more difficult. How much? Well, that's the open question.

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." That's a pretty good deal. "And the angels said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. "Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore Sarah laughed with herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" She's kind of sceptical about the whole angel, man, God, having a child at 100 thing. And rightly so. "And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which I am old? Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At the time

appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh. And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way."

I'm going to make a small detour and talk to you about potential, again. I really thought about it a lot. I think music speaks of potential. I think music speaks of potential bursting forward, and that's why it's so deeply meaningful. It's this continual pattern revelation of the next wonderful thing that might happen. It's something like that. So there's that, and people find that deeply meaningful. And then there's the idea that we all have potential that isn't realized, but that we regard that potential, even though it's not realized, as real, which I can't get my head around, at all. It just doesn't make sense, although everyone acts that way, and everyone believes it. What you act reflects what you believe, and you make judgements about yourself and others based on those beliefs. They're deep judgements. I think it's undeniable that you believe that there is such a thing as human potential. If you act at all, if you expect things of people at all, then you're demonstrating your commitment to the ideal of potential. But I wonder if there's something even deeper going on, because we, modern people, are very materialistic. There's great power in that, obviously. For better or for worse, we've obtained great control over the material world. But we do have a tendency to think of the world purely as a material structure. It isn't really obvious to me that the world is exactly a material structure. It seems to be something more like constrained potential.

Everything is a certain way, but everything that is a certain way could be a multitude of other ways, in almost an infinite multitude of other ways. The degree to which something that is could be a multitude of other ways is dependent in large part on how you interact with it. Even with materials that we're very familiar with, we continue to discover new properties and put them to use. Things are compacted into their material form, but that doesn't exhaust what they are, especially not in relationship to other things. It seems to me, even if you can't replace the materialist perspective with the perspective that it's better to construe being as if it's made of possibility, rather than the world as if it's made of matter, it's at least useful to have that as an additional viewpoint. You could say, 'well, the material philosophy is very useful as a tool for obtaining certain sorts of benefits,' which it clearly is. But then this more metaphysical perspective, which I think is more accurate in some ways, that the world is a place of potential, is also an extraordinary useful way to approach the world. It's

practically useful.

We talked last week a little bit about doing something as simple as trying to organize a room. It's by no means obvious how much potential there is in a room. There's a very large amount of potential in any given room—a tremendous amount of potential, especially if it's connected with people... Maybe an inexhaustible amount of potential, and maybe there's an inexhaustible amount of potential, everywhere, that we just don't know to get access to. It's certainly true, to some degree: we don't know how to get access to all the potential of our children, for example, or ourselves, or our loved ones, or the people that we know. So I think this story is trying to hammer that idea home, too: don't be so sure that it's impossible, or, maybe, don't let the assumption that it's impossible stop you from going forth into the world. That's like an inoculation against nihilism.

For a long time, I understood nihilism very well. I could understand its rationale, associated with the tragedy of life, associated with suffering and evil, associated with an observation of finitude and the arbitrary and unjust nature of the world. But the more I've thought about it, the less I've come to believe that there's any excuse for it, whatsoever. I think the reason for that is that it forestalls effort. It forestalls the ability to discover for yourself. Maybe there's no reason to be so goddamn hopeless, except that it's easier to be useless. Now, believe me, I'm not saying that's what's besetting people who are clinically depressed, for example. That's not my point. Clinical depression is a terrible thing. There's lots of reasons to be tossed into a catastrophic condition. That isn't what I mean. I mean that kind of cynical, arrogant, rational, hyper-intelligent nihilism that throws the world away as if it's of little use before it's been properly engaged with. Better to engage with it and see what happens—and better to make the assumption that, if the world isn't returning to you what it is that you need, then either you're not doing it right or you've conceptualized what you need badly. Why not at least open yourself up to that possibility? Because you could be wrong. This is a great thing to know: hopefully, if you're suffering, you're wrong, because if you're suffering and you're right, then there's nowhere to go. So it's very useful to find out whatever errors you might be committing.

Another thing that's really interesting about the Jews in the Old Testament—it's a remarkable thing. Every single time they get flattened by God, it's always their fault. They never say, 'the world that God created is corrupt, and God is evil.' They never say that, no matter what catastrophe occurs. When they have every reason to at least put that hypothesis forward, they don't. They say, 'we erred;

we walked off the path. It's our fault.' That's hard, you know? It puts all the weight of human catastrophe on the human being. That's very hard. But the upside is that it gives you the control. It opens up a possibility that you could be the person that could set it right, if you would just let go of what's in your way, whatever that is.

"And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?" I guess God is talking to himself, here. Or maybe he's talking to the angels. But I think he's trying to make a decision. "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know."

Well, we don't know what's happened in Sodom and Gomorrah, but we know that God's got wind of it, and that that's not good. We know that sin mean to miss the mark, and so we know that whatever's happened in Sodom and Gomorrah means that something about the natural, ethical order of things has been seriously violated. There's a strong intimation in the Old Testament—which I think, by the way, is completely correct—that, if the proper order of being is violated, and that's something like the balance of chaos of order, then all hell will break loose. One of the things I can tell you from reading a very comprehensive set of myths from around the world is that that's a conclusion that human beings have come to everywhere: stay on the goddamn path, and be careful, because if you start to mess around, and you deviate—especially if you know that you're deviating—things are not going to go well for you. That idea is everywhere. I think the idea is right because there aren't that many ways of doing things right, and there's a lot of ways of doing things wrong. If you do things wrong, the consequences of doing them wrong can be truly catastrophic.

One of the things I learned from reading [Viktor Frankl](#), first, but then [Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn](#), which I think did a deeper job, and [Václav Havel](#) thought the same thing... These people were very much trying to understand places like Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Solzhenitsyn's [Gulag Archipelago](#) is a

particularly good analysis of what happened in the Soviet Union. His conclusion—and it's a 2,100 page conclusion, and it's hammered home with a hammer. It's a book that everyone should read, assuming that you can read a 2,100 scream, because that's basically what it is. First of all, what he does is document just how terrible things were in the Soviet Union between 1919 and 1959. No matter how terrible you think they were, unless you know the stories, they were a lot more terrible than that. They were terrible personally because everyone lied. They were terrible in families because two out of five people were government informers. They were terrible among friends because no one could tell each other the truth. They were terrible socially because the whole system was corrupt and reliant on slave labour. They were terrible philosophically because the doctrine of man upon which the state was founded was hopeless and nihilistic. They were murderous, destructive, and genocidal. They got it wrong at every single level of analysis, simultaneously. The question is, why? Solzhenitsyn's answer, and to some degree Viktor Frankl and Václav Havel's—and, I would say, Nelson Mandela and Gandhi's... They all ended up in the same conceptual sphere. The answer was, because individual people lived crooked lives—because individual people swallowed lies and spoke them, and didn't stand up for the truth. The corruption that spread from each individual pulled the entire state mechanism into that corruption, and it made everything into hell.

There are other theories. Obedience, right? That's kind of the [Milgram](#) idea, that it's easy to make human beings obedient to people and authority. I've explored that idea quite a bit with regards to what happened, for example, in the Nazi concentration camps. Yes, you can set circumstances up so that people are likely to be obedient to orders that are pathological. There's no doubt about that. And yes, sometimes that's indicative of the weakness of their character, but that's not the issue. The idea that what happened in Nazi Germany was because a population of good people listened to a tiny minority of bad people is really not a good theory. The Nazi ethos was there at every single level of the social organization, right from the familial, all the way up to the leadership. It was the same thing, all the way up and all the way down. It was the same in the Soviet Union.

So if you miss the mark, which is apparently what the people of Sodom and Gomorrah did—their sin was grievous—then you risk destruction. I just cannot see how, after the 20th century, anyone with any sense could possibly not see that as true. There's a line in the Old Testament: 'the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.' I can tell you, one of the things that frightened me badly



was the realization—from reading Solzhenitsyn, Dostoevsky and a variety of other things that I was reading at the same time...Dostoevsky said that a human being is not only responsible for everything they do, but for everything that everyone else does. Now that's crazy, and he was an epileptic and a mystic, and that's a crazy thing to say. But there's something about it that's true, because if you were better, the people around you would be less worse than they are. And if you were good enough, you don't know how much better the people around you would be.

So there's this idea, too, that Christ took the sins of the world unto himself. That's a complicated idea, man. I wrestled with that one for a very long time, but I figured out, at least in part, what it means. It's something like the realization of complete humanity. To take the sins of the world unto yourself is to understand the Nazi concentration camp guard, because that person is human, and so are you. So if you can't see you in that, then you don't know who you are. And if you can see you in that, well, then you've started to take the sins of the world unto yourself, because you've actually started to take responsibility for those terrible things. I think it's the motto of the holocaust museum in Washington: 'we must never forget.' That's close. You can't remember what you don't understand. You will forget what you don't understand. The question is, well, what are you supposed to remember about the holocaust? That it was a historical event? That six million people died? That's not what's to remember. What's to remember is that that's what people can do, and you're one of them. And if you don't understand that you could do that, then you don't know who you are.

So God's making a case, here. He's making a case that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah have sinned and are making a large racket that even God has heard about. That's a very common mythological motif, by the way: the sins and noise of humanity can reach such a clamour that even the gods hear it and are forced to intervene. That comes all the way from the Mesopotamian creation story. So anyways, it's logical. 'Yeah, they're sinning. So what?' No, not 'so what.' It means that God's offended, and that everything is at risk. That's what it means. That's something worth taking seriously.

"And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord. And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?"

This is a very interesting part of the story. A friend of mine took me to task the other day when I was writing about portraying the Old Testament God as pretty

harsh and judgemental and the New Testament God as sort of all loving, which he isn't, because there's the whole Book of Revelations thing. But I got that partly from reading [Northrop Frye](#). But going through the Old Testament in more detail, I realized that is a too low resolution interpretation, and that God, who's dispensing a fair bit of harsh justice in the Old Testament, is also someone who can be negotiated with, weirdly enough. That's what happens, here. Abraham has just been told that whatever's going on in Sodom and Gomorrah is seriously not good, and that God's going to do something about it. He takes it upon himself—this is an act of mercy—to ask God to be a bit more judicious. It's like, 'ok, you're going to wipe out the city? Well, bad things are happening there, but there's probably a few people in the damn city that aren't completely corrupted by what's going on there.' Of course, that's an open question. It's an open question, for example, how many people there were in Nazi Germany who weren't completely corrupted by what was going on in Nazi Germany, and the same thing could be said about Maoist China, and the same thing could be said about the Soviet Union. It's like, well, perhaps there was a person, somewhere, who didn't understand, at some level, what was happening. But the whole issue of willful blindness certainly springs to mind, if nothing else.

Anyways, Abraham decides to intercede with God on behalf of these people who are going to be destroyed. He says, "wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Perhaps there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner"—he's kind of reminding God that he's a good guy, as far as I can tell—"to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" God seems a bit taken aback, to me. "And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which I am but dust and ashes. "Perhaps there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And God said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. And Abraham spake unto him yet again, and said"—he's kind of sneaking up on God, here—"Perhaps there shall be forty found there. And God said, I will not do it for forty's sake. And Abraham said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Perhaps there shall be thirty found there. And God said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. And Abraham"—who really seems to be pushing his luck, at this point—"said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: perhaps there shall be twenty found there. And God said, I will not destroy it for twenty's

sake. And Abraham said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Perhaps ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake. And the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place."

There's three ways you can read that part of the story. One is that you can bargain with God, even if you're kind of annoying about it. So that's interesting. The second is that, even if there's a minority of good in a place that isn't good, it won't be slated for destruction. That's kind of a good thing. And the third is, a minority of good in a place can keep it from being destroyed. That's a really good thing, too. I believe that, as well. I think that good is more powerful than evil. Naivety isn't, but I think that good is. I think that in a place that's corrupt, a minority of people who stand forth against the corruption can prevail. I think one of the best examples of that, again, was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. He was in the terrible work camps when he wrote his book. He memorized most of it, which is not an easy thing to do when it's 2,100 pages long and set in very tiny font. He memorized most of it, and then he wrote it. It was one of the things that brought down the Soviet Union. It was published in the 1970s, first of all in the West. The first thing that happened, at least initially, was that Communism, as an ethic system, lost absolutely all credibility among anyone who was even vaguely educated, immediately upon the publication of the Gulag Archipelago. He pulled the moral slats out from underneath it. The book was definitely one of the reasons—there were many, but it was definitely one of the reasons—why the rotten system crumbled and fell without a war. That's a great example of how one person can take on a tyranny and prevail. And he's not the only person who did that sort of thing. Gandhi did the same thing. I mean, I don't think the English were the Russians, but things were not so good in India. What Gandhi did in India—under the influence, by the way, of Leo Tolstoy—was also a remarkable example of a single person intervening in a catastrophe and setting it far more right than it could be.

"And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot"—Lot is Abraham's nephew—"sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night." Abraham's nephew is acting in exactly the manner that Abraham does: he shows hospitality to these people. And they said, 'no, no. We'll stay in the street all night.' "And he pressed upon

them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat. But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them."

That's the part of the story that's been used as a diatribe, let's say, against homosexuality, because 'to know' is to engage in sexual intercourse. The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah were willing to tear the strangers out of Lot's house and use them and abuse them as they saw fit. So what are they doing? Well, they're violating the principles that govern appropriate conduct with the stranger. And maybe the stranger is something you shouldn't mess with, because you don't know who you're messing with. So that's warning number one. They're violating the essential principles of hospitality. The sexual thing is something more like the absolute danger of immediate gratification, sexual included, outside the constraints of any civilized structure. That's as uncivilized behaviour as you could possibly hope for: strangers come into your city; they're in the house of someone who's part of your city; they're being shown hospitality; a mob shows up and says, 'fork 'em over, man. We're going to do whatever the hell we want to them, and it's not gonna be good. And if you get in the way, things are going to go even worse for you.' So that's what it seems to be. It's completely unregulated behaviour. It's behaviour that's outside the confines of any civilized structure. It's an indication that the social structure of the entire society has collapsed, so that there's nothing left for the inhabitants to do except to engage in the most brutal of immediate gratification and destruction. Well, so what does Lot do?

"...I pray thee, brethren, do not do so wickedly. Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof."

It's hard to know what to make of that. It doesn't exactly seem like the advisable thing for Lot to do. But I think it is, at least, an indication of the degree to which he took the solemn vow of hospitality seriously. I think that's the idea that the story is trying to promote.

"And the men said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee than

sojourn, and he will needs be a judge. Now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door." Maybe Lot's thought was something like, 'well, we're done, and perhaps I can spare some of us.' "And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door. But the angels put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door. And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door." So they were so corrupt that they were blind and could not see now, even to find the door. "And the angels said unto Lot, Hast thou here any family members? son in law, and they sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law. "And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto them: and they brought them forth, and set him without the city."

So this is an indication of not acting with appropriate haste when the time has come. Lot's already seen what's happened: he's seen that the men came to his door; he's seen that they were murderous rapists; he saw that the angels took them out, and he's still hesitant to leave that place. I guess one of the things that this story requires people to ask themselves is, are you in a place that's so bad that you should leave? When are you in a place that's so bad that you should leave? And if you are in a place that's so bad that you should leave, then the time to leave is now, because there's no time to waste.

"And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed. And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my Lord: Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die: Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one"—which means, maybe it's not big and corrupt, like Sodom and Gomorrah—"Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live." Matthew Henry said, "Lot lingered; he

trifled. Thus many who are under convictions about their spiritual state, and the necessity of a change, defer that needful work." "And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered Zoar. Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt." No nostalgia for catastrophe. I think that's what that means: when you leave what's not good, you wash the dust off your feet, and you don't look back. That's a very harsh lesson. The idea of necessity for immediate action is echoed a bit in the New Testament. These are some of the harsher words that Christ said. This is from Matthew 8. Christ is addressing a multitude and asking people to follow him. A disciple comes up to him and says, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." It seems like a perfectly reasonable request. "But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead." This is from Matthew 12: "While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, 'Who is My mother and who are My brothers? For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.'"

Well, what does all that mean? It means that there's no excuses, whatsoever, for not getting up and getting at it. That's what it means. It even means that, when people are beset with a catastrophe, like, let's say, the death of their father, that they're prone to use that as an excuse for not going about the business that they should be going about. They can say to themselves, 'well, I would, except...' Believe me, there's always good reasons for not doing what you should. That's for sure. Reasons pile up, day after day, to not do what you should, especially because you're aiming at things in the future; you can put them off indefinitely because of the demands of the day. But these stories say a variety of things, especially in combination. They say, 'when you leave somewhere terrible, do not look back. There's no nostalgia.' That's the letting the dead parts of yourself go. And then, if you're going to follow the good, it means no excuse, whatsoever, under any circumstances. It's taken even farther with regards to familial relationships: you can't even let them stand in your way. I think that's all true. I

think I've seen virtually all of that in my clinical practice. There's no excuse for not getting at what it is that you should be doing.

There's something else that's going on here, especially in the New Testament stories, which is even, maybe, worse: it's absolutely reprehensible to justify your inaction with the catastrophe that extracts mercy from other people. There's a tricky game—'well, of course I can't do that. Look at the terrible thing that's just happened to me.' 'Ok, I understand. You're absolved of any necessity to move forward because of your current catastrophe.' Well, actually you're not, and it's rather rude of you to use it as an excuse, and it's certainly counterproductive.

"And Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord: And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace. "And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remember Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrown, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt. And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he feared to dwell in Zoar: and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters. "And the firstborn said unto the younger, Our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth: Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father. And they made their father drink wine that night: and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. "And it came to pass on the morrow, that the firstborn said unto the younger, Behold, I lay yesternight with my father: let us make him drink wine this night also: and go thou in, and lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father. And they made their father drink wine that night also: and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father."

The story's outlined the ethical catastrophe of Sodom and Gomorrah; the dissolution of the civilized constraints that should regulate all behaviour. And then the city is destroyed, but there's an echo of it because Lot had lived in Sodom and Gomorrah. What happens to him, even after he escapes, is that he gets tangled into an incestuous web. I think that's—it's not foreshadowing: it's postshadowing, if there's such a thing. It's an echo and a reminder of how terrible whatever it was that was happening in Sodom and Gomorrah was—that, even after escaping, the iniquity still remained. That's a pretty good place to

stop. We got through two of three stories, so that's not too bad. Next week I'll talk about the sacrifice of Isaac, and see if I can get into the next stories, as well. Next week is the last lecture—except, I talked to the theatre people, and it looks like I'll be able to rent the theatre once a month, at least for the next four months. So I'm going to do that, and I'll announce when I'm going to do that. I'll probably continue doing this for as long as you continue to come and listen.



## **XII: The Great Sacrifice: Abraham and Isaac**

Thank you all for coming. I've been thinking about things that I'm happy about. What I'm most happy about is that I haven't spilled my bubbly water into my computer, so far, while I've been doing these lectures. I'll probably do it tonight, now that I'm bragging about having avoided it. This is the last lecture in this 12-part series. I did mention that I have made arrangements with the theatre, to do this once a month for the next four months, and we'll play it by ear past then. I want to continue, and find another venue, and perhaps to do it every two weeks, but certainly once a month. Maybe I can even get deeper into the material, if it's only once a month. Then we'll really slow down to a snail's crawl.

This is a tough one, tonight. It's a story that everyone with any sense should approach with a substantial degree of trepidation. I've been working on my book this week, on chapter seven, which is called "Do What Is Meaningful, Not What is Expedient." It's been a very difficult chapter, because I'm trying to extend my understanding of sacrifice—which is, of course, what we're going to talk about tonight—in great detail. I've been wrestling with exactly how to do that. I'm going to read you some of that, I think, today. I don't generally read when I do my lectures, but this is so complicated that I'm not confident of my ability to just spin it off spontaneously.

It will also give me a chance to test out if what I've written—which I've been struggling with—has the kind of poetic flow that I'd like to have. If you're writing, it's really good to read things aloud, because you can tell if you've got the rhythmic cadence right. So, anyways, thank you all for coming. Many of you have, I believe, attended all 12 lectures. That's really remarkable. It's amazing that this place has been full every single lecture. It's completely unbelievable for that to be the case. This has been watched more than 2 million views. It's not 2 million people, because it would be the same people, I would suspect, many times. That's also crazy, but it's a crazy world, and it seems to be getting crazier. Hopefully, this is some addition to stabilizing it, and making it slightly more sane. That's the hope, anyways.

We've got a couple of stories to deal with tonight—complex, complex stories that are not really easy to comprehend, in any sense of the word. With the story of Isaac, God calls on his chosen individual—Abraham, the person he's made this contract with—to sacrifice his son. How in the world are you supposed to

make any sense out of that? It's exactly that sort of story that makes modern people, who are convinced that the faster we put the Biblical stories behind us, the better—it's grist for their mill, because it seems like such an incomprehensible and barbaric act, on the part of God. I hesitate to even approach it, because there's so many ways that an interpretation of that sort can go wrong. But we'll see how it goes. Let's walk through it, and see what happens. We'll start with the story of Sarah and Isaac. "And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said." Remember: when Abraham was in the midst of his appropriate sacrificial routines—which we've characterized as his return to the contract he made with the idea of the Good; the contract with God—he was informed, by God, that he would get what he most wanted, which was an heir, despite his advanced old age. Of course, Sarah was very sceptical about that, as she had every reason to be. But this story opens with the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. "And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him. And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him. And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age. And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned."

I suppose one of the purposes—perhaps the literary purposes of this story—is to exaggerate, for dramatic purposes, the importance of a child. When people are young—and I think this is particularly true in the modern world—they seem to often regard the possibility of having a child as an impediment to their lifestyle. Of course, in some ways, I suppose that's true. Although, you have to have quite a lifestyle before a child actually constitutes an impediment, because having a child in your life is actually something that's remarkable almost beyond belief. You can have a relationship with a child that is better than any relationship that you've ever had with anyone in your life, if you're careful, and if you're fortunate.

I've seen many people delay having children for understandable reasons. It's no simple decision to have a child. Of course, now we can make the decision to have a child—which, of course, people couldn't in the past ages, really. But, sometimes, you see people delay, and they delay too long, and then they don't

get to have a child, and then they're desperate. They spend a decade doing fertility treatments, or that sort of thing, and immersing themselves in one disappointment after another. It's just at that point that you see exactly how catastrophic it can be for people not to be able to undergo one of the great adventures of life, let's say. One of the things this story does, by delaying the arrival of Isaac continually, is to exaggerate the important significance of a child, because it's truly not until you're deprived of something that you have any sense of what its value is. Abraham was waiting a hundred years—a very long time—and the same with Sarah. So they're unbelievably excited. Of course, this also heightens the drama that's inherent in the entire sacrificial story. It's not only that, eventually, Abraham is called upon to sacrifice Isaac, which would be bad enough under any circumstances whatsoever, self-evidently. The fact that he's been waiting a century for this child, desperately, and made all the proper sacrifices, and lived in the appropriate manner to allow this to occur, dramatically heightens the literary tensions.

Now, you remember Hagar? This is the next part of the story. Hagar was Sarah's handmaid. When Sarah was unable to bear Abraham a child, she sent him Hagar. Hagar immediately got pregnant, and she gave birth to Ishmael. The story picks up from that point. I mentioned, in a couple of weeks in a row, just how interesting it has been to scour the internet for the paintings that are associated with these stories. There's an amazing wealth of great paintings that illustrate every single Biblical story. It's really been enlightening to find out just exactly how poorly educated I am. I'm a great admirer of artistic talent and endeavour, but there's so much that I don't know about the history of art that it's just absolutely beyond belief. To see this treasure trove of images, that I really had no idea existed...Of course, they're spread all over the world. It's only been in recent years that you could have access to them in this way. It's a constant revelation of the depth to which these stories have absolutely permeated our culture, and the loss that it would be if we didn't know them properly, and take them with the degree of seriousness that they deserve. So, anyways, this is one of those great images. "And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son."

There's been quite a bit of tension between Sarah and Hagar, as you could imagine there might be. Why wouldn't there be? First of all, Hagar had the first

child, and that elevated her status. She was Sarah's handmaid, and so that's obviously going to be quite awkward. And then she lorded it over Sarah because of the fact that she got pregnant so easily. And now we see this situation, where Ishmael is doing the same thing with regards to Isaac. That causes a substantial amount of trouble. A familial division is occurring, here.

"And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called. And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed."

That's an interesting outcome, too. We pointed out, before, the fact that, because Abraham has lived his life properly, and has kept a contract with God, there's every evidence in the story that, no matter what the vicissitudes of Abraham's life—how the great serpent that he sits on, in some sense, weaves back and forth—there's always the promise that things will work out positively. You can read that as naive optimism, but I think it has a lot more to do with the actual power of keeping the contractual agreement. I really do believe it, and I've spent a tremendous amount of time thinking about this over the last couple of weeks, in addition to the decades before that. And all that's happened, since I've been doing these Biblical lectures, is that my conviction in this has been strengthened. What's quite interesting is that, if you do what it is that you're called upon to do—which is to lift your eyes up above the mundane, daily, selfish, impulsive issues that might upset you—and you attempt to enter into a contractual relationship with that which you might hold in the highest regard, whatever that might be—to aim high, and to make that important above all else in your life—that fortifies you against the vicissitudes of existence, like nothing else can. I truly believe that's the most practical advice that you could possibly receive.

I was answering questions last night. I did this Q and A, which I do about once a month for the people who are supporting me on [Patreon](#), and which I also release on YouTube. Somebody was struggling with their religious faith, and they asked what they could do about that. I'd also been thinking about the difference between [Nietzsche](#) and [Dostoevsky](#), which I'll discuss in a minute. I was trying to answer this question in regards to religious faith because this person was shaky in his faith in life, let's say, which is a better way of thinking about it. It seems to me that the way that you fortify your faith in Being, life, and your own existence isn't to try to convince yourself of the existence of a transcendent power that you could believe in, in the same way that you believe in a set of

empirical facts. I don't think that's the right approach. I think it's a weak approach, actually. I don't think that's the right cognitive technology for that set of problems. That's more a technology that you'd use if you were trying to solve a scientific problem. It's more something that needs to be embedded in action, rather than in storable belief. The way that you fortify your faith in life is to assume the best—something like that—and then to act courageously in relationship to that. That's tantamount to expressing your faith in the highest possible Good. It's tantamount to expressing your faith in God. It's not a matter of stating, 'I believe in the existence of a transcendent deity,' because, in some sense, who cares what you believe? You might, and all that, but that's not the issue. The issue, it seems to me, is how you act.

I was thinking about this intensely when I was thinking about Nietzsche and Dostoevsky. Of course, you know that Nietzsche was the philosopher who announced the death of God, and who's a great, great, critic of Christianity, and a vicious critic of institutional Christianity, in the best sense. He announced the death of God, and he said that we'd never find enough water to wash away the blood. It wasn't a triumphant proclamation, even though it's often read that way. Nietzsche's conclusion from the death of God, the fact that our ethical systems were going to collapse when the foundation was pulled out from underneath them, was that human beings were going to have to create their own values. There's a problem with that. This is something that [Carl Jung](#) was very thorough in investigating. It doesn't really look like people are capable of creating their own values, because you're not really capable of moulding yourself just any old way you want to be. You have a nature that you have to contend with, and so it isn't a matter of creating our own values. We don't have that capacity. It might be a matter of rediscovering those values, which is what Jung was attempting to do.

I think Nietzsche was, actually, profoundly wrong, in that recommendation. I think he was psychologically wrong. Dostoevsky wrote, in many ways, in parallel to Nietzsche, and he was a great influence on Nietzsche. Their lives paralleled each other to a degree that's somewhat miraculous. In some sense, it's quite uncanny. Dostoevsky was obviously a literary figure, while Nietzsche was a philosopher—a literary philosopher, but still a philosopher. Dostoevsky wrestled with exactly the same problems that Nietzsche wrestled with, but he did it in a different way. He did it in a literary manner. He has this great book, [The Brothers Karamazov](#). The hero of the book is really Alyosha, who's a monastic novice; a very good guy. Not an intellect, but a person of great character. But

he has an older brother, Ivan, who's a great intellect, and a very handsome soldier, and a brave man. Dostoevsky's villains—Ivan isn't exactly a villain, but that's close enough. Dostoevsky makes his villains extraordinarily powerful, so if Dostoevsky is trying to work out an argument, he clothes the argument in the flesh of one of his characters. If it's an argument he doesn't agree with, then he makes that character as strong as he possibly can—as strong, attractive, and intelligent as he possibly can, and then he lets him just have at 'er. Ivan is constantly attacking Alyosha, and, from every direction, trying to knock him off his perch of faith. Alyosha can't address a single one of Ivan's criticisms. He doesn't have the intellect for it, and Ivan has a devastating intellect—it's devastating to him, himself, as well.

What happens in *The Brothers Karamazov*, essentially, is that Alyosha continues to act out his commitment to the Good, let's say, and, in that manner, he's triumphant. It doesn't matter that he loses the arguments, because the arguments aren't exactly the point. The arguments, in some sense, are a side issue. Because the issue—and this is the existential issue—is not what you believe—as if it's a set of facts—but how you conduct yourself in the world. Dostoevsky grasped that, and it's one of the things that makes him such an amazing literary figure, and a genius. He was smart enough to formulate the arguments in a manner that no one else really could, with a possible exception of Nietzsche, and that's quite an exception. And yet, using his dramatic embodiment, he could still lay out solutions to the problems that he was describing, that are extremely compelling. Both [Crime and Punishment](#), which is an amazing, thrilling, engrossing book, and *The Brothers Karamazov*—all of Dostoevsky's great books, really, circulate around those profound moral issues. And so, I've learned a tremendous amount from reading him.

"And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called. And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed."

All right. I commented that Abraham is being blessed in multiple directions, even when things are going wrong. This is pretty bad, because his family, in some sense, is breaking up. There's this emphasis in the text that, because he's kept this contractual relationship with God, that he's in an ark—we could put it that way—and that he'll triumph through the vicissitudes of life, which is the best that you can hope for. It's quite interesting. Again, one of the things that's so powerful about the Abrahamic stories is that it's not like Abraham, even

so powerful about the Abrahamic stories is that it's not like Abraham, even though he's chosen by God, has an easy time of it. He has a rough life. It's a successful life, and all that, but it's not without its troubles. That's for sure. It's got every sort of trouble that you could possibly imagine, pretty much. That's one of the things that makes the stories so realistic, as far as I'm concerned.

"And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba."

It's funny...I guess this had more of an emotional impact on me this week than it might have because my daughter just had a baby, a week ago. I've been thinking about this sort of thing...We're so happy that that's happened. I was trying to put myself in the conceptual space of the people who these stories are about, and trying to notice the catastrophe that this sort of breakup would actually constitute. The visual images really help with that, because they're so carefully crafted. They hit the story from so many different directions that they add an additional layer of emotional meaning to it, which I found very, very significant.

"And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs." She was sent to wander in the desert, you know? It's not just that she has to leave Abraham's household: it's that where she goes is not really amenable to life. It's an extraordinarily dramatic and terrible tale. "And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bow shot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. "And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer."

That's actually a relevant detail, too: the fact that he became an archer. I think I mentioned to you, at one point, that the word 'sin' is derived from a Greek word, ['hamartia.'](#) even though it sounds nothing like that word. Hamartia is actually an archery term. It means to miss the bullseye. That's a lovely metaphor for sin, I think, because it's associated so tightly with the idea of goal, direction, and aim. There's a metaphorical idea that's embedded in that image, and that is that a human being is something that specifies a target—which we do all the time with

our eyes, by the way. Our eyes are target-specifying mechanisms. We have very precise central focal vision. We use our focal vision to target the aim of our behaviour. And so we are aiming creatures. It's built right into our body. We're built on a hunting platform. We're aiming creatures. We do that cognitively, as well as behaviourally. As hunters, we take aim at things. We take aim at moving targets, and we're very good at bringing them down. We've been doing that for who knows how long—millions of years, really. Even chimpanzees are carnivorous, by the way, and we split from them about 6 million years ago. And so we've been hunting and aiming for a very, very long period of time. We still have aims in our life, right? And that's how we describe them: 'what are you aiming at,' or 'what are your aims,' or 'what are your goals. What's your target?' It's all based on that hunting metaphor. The fact that Ishmael becomes an archer means that he's someone who can take aim at the center of the bullseye and hit it precisely. That's an indication that he's a good man—and, I suppose, he carries part of the narrative weight of the story, because, of course, he's Abraham's son, and you'd expect Abraham's son to be someone who's very good at taking aim.

"And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran." He could live there and survive, which is no trivial thing. "And his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt."

Ok, so that's the story of Hagar. It's a fairly straightforward story. It's complex emotionally, and it brings up the terrible theme of familial catastrophe, the complications of romantic and familial relationships, and all of that. But it really serves as a prodrome to the next story, which is the one that's so complex and difficult to understand.

"And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham"—which is a funny thing for God to do, I suppose—"and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you."



It's really one of the first times that we've come across the word 'worship,' if I remember correctly. It's a very difficult word to contend with, too. When I was a kid, it was never really obvious why God would want to be worshipped. You go to church; you offer up your praise and thanks to God. You think, 'well, really? Does that make a lot of sense? Why in the world is that what he wants?' It's almost like you're kneeling down in front of an ancient, Middle Eastern, tyrannical emperor and vowing your submission. That never sat well with me. I suppose it doesn't sit well with many people. I think that's because it's not the proper way of conceptualizing it.

What Abraham does continually—and this seems to be implicit in the use of the word 'worship,' in this particular situation. As we discussed, he has an adventure in his life. It comes to an end. Then there's a period where he reconstitutes himself, to some degree. That's when he makes his sacrifices. It seems to me that it's that reconstitution that constitutes the worship. The worship is something like—this is alluding back to my original proposition that it's how you act that's the issue. The worship is the decision to enact the Good in whatever form it is that you can conceptualize it, as well as trying to continually reconceptualize the Good, in a manner that makes the Good that you're conceptualizing even that much better, right? When you start aiming, the probability that you're going to be aiming in the right direction is very low. But hypothetically, as you aim, and as you practice, and as you learn, the target is going to shift in front of your eyes, and you're going to be able to follow it ever-more-clearly. That seems to be a much more appropriate interpretation of what constitutes proper worship, especially given the context that this word is used in, in this particular story. I suppose it's akin to the later Christian idea that it's the imitation of Christ that's the sacred duty of every Christian, and of every human being, I suppose, insofar as that's an archetypal idea.

The embodiment of the Good is the issue. It's not your stated belief in the Good. When Nietzsche was criticizing Christianity, this is actually one of the things he brought up as a major issue. He believed Christianity had lost its way because it had introduced a confusion between stated belief, which is, say, your belief in the divinity of Christ—whatever it means if you state that. It isn't obvious what it means when you state that, because it isn't obvious what it would mean if you believe it, or even what it is that you're believing in. As far as Nietzsche was concerned, in some sense, not only was that beside the point, it was dangerously beside the point, because it actually allowed the Christian believer not to adopt the moral burden that was actually appropriate to the faith, which was to—and

I'm using a Jungian concept—manifest the archetype within the confines of your own life. That's to make your relationship with the divine, transcendent, and infinite into something that's actually realizable in the context of your own life, which is to say that you're supposed to act out the highest Good of which you're capable. That will transform your life, to some degree, into an archetypal adventure. There's no way around that, because as you attempt to climb a higher mountain, let's say, or to aim at a higher target, or something like that, the things around you will become increasingly dramatic and of import. That happens by necessity, obviously: if you're aiming at something difficult and profound, and you're really working at it, then your life is going to become, perhaps, increasingly difficult and profound. But that might be ok. That might be exactly what you need as an antidote to the implicit limitations that face you, as a human being.

"...and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." Now there's an implication, here, too. It's foreshadowing that Abraham offering up his son is actually a form of worship, and it's continuous with what he's already done. Now I'm going to read you some of the things that I've written, and then I'll return to this. We'll see how that goes.

"Life is suffering. That's clear. There's no more basic, irrefutable truth. It's basically what God tells Adam and Eve, immediately before he kicks them out of Paradise: 'unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiple thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; by the sweat of your brow will you eat your food, until you return to the ground; since from it you were taken: for dust you are, and to dust you will return.'"

Rough. We've associated that with Adam and Eve's eyes opening, and them becoming self-conscious and discovering the future, becoming fully aware, falling into history. It seems, to me, to be a very realistic, existential portrayal of the predicament of humankind.

"What should be done about that? The simplest, most obvious, and most direct answer? Pursue pleasure, and follow your impulses. Live for the moment. Do what's expedient. Lie, cheat, steal, deceive, manipulate—but don't get caught. In

an ultimately meaningless universe, what difference could it make? And this is by no means a new idea. The fact of life's tragedy and the suffering that is part of it has been used to justify the pursuit of immediate selfish gratification for a very long time."

Even reading Jung—he often writes as if before the rise of the conflict between religion and science, which culminated, say, in Nietzsche's pronouncement about the death of God. People lived ensconced, quite safely, within a religious conceptualization, and imbued their life with meaning. That was just the state of reality. But there's ancient writings that make it quite clear that the crises of faith that characterize modern people were certainly far from unknown in the past. Here's one of those writings. This is from Wisdom 2, the revised standard version:

"Short and sorrowful is our life, and there is no remedy when a man comes to his end, and no one has been known to return from Hades. Because we were born by mere chance, and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been; because the breath in our nostrils is smoke, and reason is a spark kindled by the beating of our hearts. When it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes, and the spirit will dissolve like empty air. Our name will be forgotten in time, and no one will remember our works; our life will pass away like the traces of a cloud, and be scattered like mist that is chased by the rays of the sun and overcome by its heat. For our allotted time is the passing of a shadow, and there is no return from our death, because it is sealed up and no one turns back.

Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that exist, and make use of the creation to the full as in youth. Let us take our fill of costly wine and perfumes, and let no flower of spring pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither. Let none of us fail to share in our revelry, everywhere let us leave signs of enjoyment, because this is our portion, and this our lot. Let us oppress the righteous poor man; let us not spare the widow nor regard the gray hairs of the aged. But let our might be our law of right, for what is weak proves itself to be useless."

It's an amazing piece of writing. It starts with an announcement for the rationale for nihilism and ends with the justification for fascist tyranny. It's thousands of years old. It's a remarkable thing to see, and to be laid out so concisely.

"The pleasure of expediency may be fleeting, but it's pleasure, nonetheless, and that's something to stack up against the terror and pain of existence. Every man

for himself, and the devil take the hindmost, as the old proverb has it. Why not simply take everything you can get, whenever the opportunity arises? Why not determine to live in that manner? What's the alternative, and why should we bother with it? Our ancestors worked out very sophisticated answers to such questions, but we still don't understand them very well. This is because they are in large part still implicit—manifest primarily in ritual and myth and, as of yet, incompletely articulated. We act them out and represent them in stories, but we're not yet wise enough to formulate them explicitly. We're still chimps in a troupe, or wolves in a pack. We know how to behave, if we know who's who, and why. We've learned that through experience. Our knowledge has been shaped by our interaction with others. We've established predictable routines and patterns of behaviour—but we don't really understand them, or know where they originated. They've evolved over great expanses of time. No one was formulating them explicitly, at least not in the dimmest reaches of the past, even though we've been telling each other how to act forever.

One day, however, not so long ago, we woke up. We were already doing, but we started noticing what we were doing. We started using our bodies as devices to represent their own actions. We started imitating and dramatizing. We invented ritual. We started acting out our own experiences. Then we started to tell stories. We coded our observations of our own drama in these stories. In this manner, the information that was first only embedded in our behaviour became represented in our stories. But we didn't and still don't understand what it all means.

The Biblical narrative of Paradise and the Fall is one such story, fabricated by our collective imagination, working over the centuries. It provides a profound account of the nature of Being, and points the way to a mode of conceptualization and action well-matched to that nature. In the Garden of Eden, prior to the dawn of self-consciousness—so goes the story—human beings were sinless. Our primordial parents, Adam and Eve, walked with God. Then, tempted by the snake, the first couple ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, discovered Death and vulnerability, and turned away from God. Mankind was exiled from Paradise, and began its effortful mortal existence. The idea of sacrifice enters soon afterward, beginning with the account of Cain and Abel, and developing through the Abrahamic stories: After much contemplation, struggling humanity learns that God's favor could be gained, and wrath averted, through proper sacrifice—and, also, that bloody murder might be motivated among those unwilling or unable to succeed in this manner.

When engaging in sacrifice, our forefathers began to act out what would be considered a proposition, if it were stated in words: that something better might be attained in the future by giving up something of value in the present. Recall, if you will, that the necessity for work is one of the curses placed by God upon Adam and his descendants in consequence of Original Sin. Adam's waking to the fundamental constraints of his Being—his vulnerability, his eventual death—is equivalent to his discovery of the future. The future: that's where you go to die. Hopefully, not too soon. Your demise might be staved off through work; through the sacrifice of the now to benefit later. It is for this reason—among others, no doubt—that the concept of sacrifice is introduced in the Biblical chapter immediately following the drama of the Fall. There's little difference between sacrifice and work. They are also both uniquely human. Sometimes, animals act as if they're working, but they are really only following the dictates of their nature. Beavers build dams. They do so because they are beavers, and beavers build dams. They don't think, 'Yeah, but I'd rather be on a beach in Mexico with my girlfriend,' while they're doing it.

Prosaically, such sacrifice—work—is delay of gratification, but that's a very mundane phrase to describe something of soul-shattering significance. The discovery that gratification could be delayed was simultaneously the discovery of time and, with it, causality. Long ago, in the dim mists of time, we began to realize that reality was structured as if it could be bargained with. We learned that behaving properly now, in the present—regulating our impulses, considering the plight of others—could bring rewards in the future, in a time and place that did not yet exist. We began to inhibit, control and organize our immediate impulses, so that we could stop interfering with other people and our future selves. Doing so was indistinguishable from organizing society: the discovery of the causal relationship between our efforts today and the quality of tomorrow motivated the social contract—the organization that enables today's work to be stored, reliably, mostly in the form of promises from others.

Understanding is often acted out before it can be articulated, just as a child act out what it means to be 'mother' or 'father' before being able to give a spoken account of what those roles mean. The act of making a ritual sacrifice to God was an early and sophisticated enactment of the idea of the usefulness of delay. There's a long conceptual journey between merely feasting hungrily and learning to set aside some extra meat, smoked by the fire, for the end of the day, or for someone who isn't present. It takes a long time to learn to keep anything later for yourself, or to share it with someone else. And those are very much the same thing as, in the former case, you're sharing with your future self. It's much

...same thing as, in the former case, you are sharing with you future self. It is easier and far more likely to selfishly and immediately wolf down everything in sight. There are similar long journeys between every leap in sophistication with regard to delay and its conceptualization: short-term sharing, storing away for the future, representation of that storage in the form of records and, later, in the form of currency—and, ultimately, the saving of money in a bank or other social institution. Some conceptualizations had to serve as intermediaries, or the full range of our practices and ideas surrounding sacrifice and work and their representation could have never emerged.

Our ancestors acted out a drama, a fiction: they personified the force that governed fate as a spirit that can be bargained with, traded with, as if it were another human being. And the amazing thing is that it worked. This was in part because the future is largely composed of other human beings—often precisely those who watched and evaluated and appraised the tiniest details of your past behaviour. It's not very far from that to God, sitting above on high, tracking your every move and writing it down for further reference in a big book. Here's a productive symbolic idea: the future is a judgemental father. That's a good start. But two additional, archetypal, foundational questions arose, because of the discovery of sacrifice, of work. Both have to do with the ultimate extension of the logic of work—which is 'sacrifice now, to gain later.'

First question. What must be sacrificed? Small sacrifices may be sufficient to solve small, singular problems. But it's possible that larger, more comprehensive sacrifice might solve an array of large and complex problems, all at the same time. That's harder, but it might be better. Adapting to the necessary discipline of medical school will, for example, fatally interfere with the licentious lifestyle of a hardcore undergraduate party animal. Giving that up is a sacrifice. But a physician can—to paraphrase George W.—really put food on his family. That's a lot of trouble dispensed with, over a very long period of time. So, sacrifices are necessary, to improve the future, and larger sacrifices can be better.

Second question. We've already established the basic principle—'sacrifice will improve the future.' What is implied by that, in the most extreme and final of cases? Where does that basic principle find its limits? We must ask, to begin, 'what would be the largest, most effective—most pleasing—of all possible sacrifices?' and then, 'how good might the best possible future be, if the most effective sacrifice could be made?'

The Biblical story of Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve's sons, immediately follows the story of the expulsion from Paradise, as mentioned previously. Cain and

the story of the expulsion from Paradise, as mentioned previously. Cain and Abel are really the first humans, since their parents were made directly by God, and not born in the standard manner. Cain and Abel live in history, not in Eden. They must work. They must make sacrifices, to please God, and they do so, with altar and proper ritual. But things get complicated. Abel's offerings please God, but Cain's do not. Abel is rewarded, many times over, but Cain is not. It's not precisely clear why, although the text strongly hints that Cain's heart is just not in it. Maybe the quality of what Cain put forward was low. Maybe his spirit was begrudging. Or maybe God was just feeling crabby. And all of this is realistic, including the text's vagueness of explanation. Not all sacrifices are of equal quality. Furthermore, it often appears that sacrifices of apparently high quality are sometimes not rewarded with a better future—and it's not clear why. Why isn't God happy? What would have to change to make Him so? Those are difficult questions—and everyone asks them, all the time, even if they don't notice. Asking such questions is indistinguishable from thinking.

The realization that pleasure could be usefully forestalled dawned with a difficulty that's almost impossible to overstate. Such a realization runs absolutely contrary to our ancient, fundamental animal instincts, which demand immediate satisfaction, particularly under conditions of deprivation, which are both inevitable and commonplace. And, to complicate the matter, such delay only becomes useful when civilization has stabilized itself enough to guarantee the existence of the delayed reward. If everything you save will be destroyed or, worse, stolen, there's no point in saving. It's for this reason that a wolf will down 20 pounds of raw meat in a single meal. He isn't thinking, 'man, I hate it when I binge. I should save some of this for next week.'

Here's a developmental progression, from animal to human. It's wrong, no doubt, in the details. But it's sufficiently correct, for our purposes, in theme: First, there's excess food. Large carcasses, mammoths or other massive herbivores, might provide that. We ate a lot of mammoths. Maybe all of them. With a large animal, there's some left for later, after a kill. That's accidental, at first—but, eventually, the utility of 'for later' starts to be appreciated. Some provisional notion of sacrifice develops at the same time: 'If I leave some, even if I want it now, I won't have to be hungry later.' That provisional notion then develops, to the next level: 'if I leave some for later, I won't have to go hungry, and neither will those I care for.' And then to the next level: 'I can't possibly eat all of this mammoth, but I can't store the rest for too long, either. Maybe I should feed some to other people. Maybe they'll remember, and feed me some of their mammoth. when they have some and I have none. Then I'll get some

mammoth now, and some mammoth later. That's a good deal. And maybe those I'm sharing with will come to trust me, more generally. Maybe then we could trade forever.' In such a manner, 'mammoth' becomes 'future mammoth,' and 'future mammoth' becomes 'personal reputation.' That's the emergence of the social contract.

To share does not mean to give away something you value, and get nothing back. That is instead only what every child who refuses to share is afraid that it means. To share means to properly initiate the process of trade. A child who can't share—who can't trade—can't have any friends, because having friends is a form of trade. Benjamin Franklin once suggested that a newcomer to a neighbourhood ask a new neighbour to do him or her a favor, citing an old maxim: 'he that has once done you a kindness will be more ready to do you another than he whom you yourself have obliged.' In Franklin's opinion, asking someone for something—not too extreme, obviously—was the most useful and immediate invitation to social interaction. Such asking allowed the neighbour to show him-or herself as a good person, at first encounter. It also meant that the neighbour could now ask the newcomer for a favour, in return, because of the debt incurred. In that manner both parties could overcome their natural hesitancy and mutual fear of the stranger.

It is better to have something than nothing. It's better yet to share generously the something you have. It's even better than that, however, to become widely known for generous sharing. That's something that lasts. That's something that's reliable. And, at this point in abstraction, we can observe how the groundwork for conceptions of 'reliable,' 'honest' and 'generous' have been laid. The basis for an articulated morality has been put in place. The productive, truthful sharer is the prototype to the good citizen, and the good man. We can see in this manner how from the simple notion that 'leftovers are a good idea' the highest moral principles might emerge.

It's as if something like the following happened as humanity developed. First were the endless tens or hundreds of thousands of years prior to the emergence of written history and drama. During this time, the twin practices of delay and exchange began to emerge, slowly and painfully. Then they became represented, in metaphorical abstraction, as rituals and tales of sacrifice, told in a manner such as this: 'It's as if there is a powerful Figure in the Sky, who sees all, and is judging you. Giving up something you value seems to make Him happy—and you want to make Him happy, because all Hell breaks loose if you don't. So,



practise sacrificing, and sharing, until you become expert at it, and things will go well for you.' No one said any of this, at least not so plainly and directly. But it was implicit in the practice and then in the stories.

Action came first, as it had to, as the animals we once were could act but could not think. Implicit, unrecognized value came first, as the actions that preceded thought embodied value, but did not make that value explicit. People watched the successful succeed and the unsuccessful fail for thousands and thousands of years. We thought it over, and we drew a conclusion: The successful among us delay gratification. The successful among us bargain with the future. A great idea began to emerge, taking ever-more-clearly-articulated form, in ever-more-articulated-stories: What's the difference between the successful and the unsuccessful? The successful sacrifice. Things get better, as the successful practice their sacrifices. The questions become increasingly precise and, simultaneously, broader: what is the greatest possible sacrifice? For the greatest possible good? And the answers become increasingly deeper and profound.

The God of Western tradition, like so many gods, requires sacrifice. We've already examined why. But sometimes He goes even further. He demands not only sacrifice, but the sacrifice of precisely what is loved best. This is most starkly portrayed, and most confusingly evident, in the story of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham, beloved of God, long wanted a son—and God promised him exactly that, after many delays, and under the apparently impossible conditions of old age and a long-barren wife. But not so long afterward, when the miraculously-borne Isaac is still a child, God turns around and in an apparently barbaric fashion demands that His faithful servant offer his son as a sacrifice. The story ends happily: God sends an angel to stay Abraham's obedient hand and accepts a ram in Isaac's stead. That's a good thing, but it doesn't really address the issue at hand: why was God's going further necessary? Why does He impose such demands?

We'll start our analysis with a truism, stark, self-evident and understated: sometimes things do not go well. That seems to have much to do with the terrible nature of the world, with its plagues and famines and tyrannies and betrayals. But here's the rub: Sometimes, when things are not going well, it's not the world that's the cause. The cause is instead that which is most valued. Why? Because the world is revealed, to an indeterminate degree, through the template of your values. If the world you are seeing is not the world you want, therefore, it is time to examine your values. It's time to rid yourself of your current presuppositions. It's time to let go. It might even be time to sacrifice what you

love best, so that you can become who you might become, instead of staying who you are.

Something valuable, given up, ensures future prosperity. Something valuable, sacrificed, pleases the Lord. What is most valuable, and best sacrificed?—or, what is at least emblematic of that? A choice cut of meat. The best animal in a flock. A most valued possession. What's above even that? Something intensely personal and painful to give up. That's symbolized, perhaps, in God's insistence on circumcision as part of Abraham's sacrificial routine. What's beyond that? What pertains more closely to the whole person, rather than the part? What constitutes the ultimate sacrifice—for the gain of the ultimate prize?

It's a close race between child and self. The sacrifice of the mother, offering her child to the world, is exemplified by Michelangelo's great sculpture, the [Pietà](#). Michelangelo crafted Mary contemplating her Son, crucified and ruined." She's sitting—most of you know this sculpture—and the body of her adult son is in her arms, and it's broken. He's been destroyed. It's a very beautiful but very tragic work of genius-level representation. "Michelangelo crafted Mary contemplating her Son, crucified and ruined. It's her fault. It was through her that He entered the world and its great drama of Being. Is it right to bring a baby into this terrible world? Every woman asks herself that question. Some say no, and they have their reasons. Mary answers yes, voluntarily, knowing full well what's to come—as do all mothers, if they allow themselves to see. It's an act of supreme courage, when undertaken voluntarily.

In turn, Mary's son, Christ, offers Himself to God and the world, to betrayal, torture and death—to the very point of despair on the cross, where he cries out those terrible words: 'my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' That is the archetypal story of the man who gives his all for the sake of the better—who offers up his life for the advancement of Being—who allows God's will to become manifest fully within the confines of a single, mortal life. That is the model for the honourable man. In Christ's case, however—as He sacrifices Himself—God, His Father, is simultaneously sacrificing His son. It is for this reason that the Christian sacrificial drama of Son and Self is archetypal. It's a story at the limit, where nothing more extreme—nothing greater—can be imagined. That's the very definition of 'archetypal.' That's the core of what constitutes 'religious.'

Pain and suffering define the world. Of that, there can be no doubt. Sacrifice can hold pain and suffering in abeyance, to a greater or lesser degree, and greater

hold pain and suffering in abeyance, to a greater or lesser degree—and greater sacrifices can do that more effectively than lesser. Of that, too, there can be no doubt. Everyone holds this knowledge in their soul. Thus, the person who wishes to alleviate suffering—who wishes to rectify the flaws in Being; who wishes to bring about the best of all possible futures; who wants to create Heaven on Earth—will make the greatest of sacrifices, of self and child, of everything that is loved, to live a life aimed at the Good. He will forego expediency. He will pursue the path of ultimate meaning. And he will in that manner bring salvation to the ever-desperate world."

"Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off." It's not an accident, also, that it's in a mountain, because a mountain is something you have to climb—and you have to climb to the pinnacle of a mountain. A mountain is up, right? A mountain stretches up, to heaven. It's a long journey, to specify the right place on the highest pinnacle. That's symbolic because, of course, it's a pinnacle that you're always trying to reach—just like you're always trying to aim. You're always trying to climb upward. At least that's the theory. It depends, to some degree, of course, on your definition of 'upward.' "And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. "And they came to the place which God had told them of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me."

When I was answering questions last night, at this Q and A, this guy asked me a question. He said he had parents who were desperate, anti-social, alcoholic addicted, friendless, and that they didn't want him to leave their home. He was the only relationship they had, and he asked what he should do. And I told him that he should leave. The reason for that is that you have a moral obligation, as a parent, to encourage your child to go out into the world, and to be whoever they

can be—to be the best they can possibly be. And, in doing that, you're encouraging them to pursue the Good. You're sacrificing them, to the Good. You're not keeping them for yourself, selfishly. You're telling them that they can go out, and live their life, and live it properly. That's the parallel to the idea of the sacrifice of Isaac, as far as I can tell.

You don't want for your son what it is that you want for him. You want for your son what would be best for him and the world, and you let go in precise proportion to your desire to have that happen. I think this is actually Freud's dictum, but I'm not certain of that. He said, 'the good mother fails,' which is a brilliant observation. When you have an infant, you do everything for the infant, because the infant can do nothing for him-or herself. But as the infant matures, and is increasingly capable of doing things for him-or herself, then you pull back, right? You pull back. Every time the child develops the ability to do something, you allow them, or encourage them, to do it. You don't interfere. Obviously, there are times that you help them, but mostly you let them learn, so that they can know how to do it in the future. That's better for you, and it's certainly better for them.

There's a rule, if you're working with the elderly in an old age home. The rule is, something like, 'don't do anything for any of the guests that they can do for themselves,' because you would compromise their independence. So, as a mother, you pull back. You pull back, and you let your child hit him-or herself against the world, and you fail to protect them. But, by failing to protect them, you encourage and ennoble them to the point where you're no longer necessary. Now, they may still want to see you, and it would be wonderful if that was the case. But the point is that you're supposed to remove yourself from the equation, by encouraging your child to be the best possible person that person could be. You sacrifice all of your desires to that—your personal desires, even your desires for your child, in relationship to you—because you want them to move forward, into the world, as a light on a hill. That's what you want, if you have any sense. And so you don't get to keep your children at home because you need them.

I'm talking generally, obviously. There are circumstances under which families make their own, idiosyncratic decisions. I'm not trying to damn everyone with a casual gesture. But the point is still strong: the good father is precisely someone who is willing to sacrifice his child to the ultimate Good. That's dramatized in this story, and it's brutal. But the world is a brutal place, and much wisdom

comes out of catastrophe. This is an indication of how much catastrophe our ancestors had to plow and work through, in order to generate the substructure for the conceptions of freedom, even, that we have today—for freedom, and the good. And that's how the story appears, to me.

I think there's more to it—I think there has to be more to it. It lays the groundwork, at least in a Christian context, for the eventual emergence of Christ, as I alluded to in my reading. That story, obviously, has to be unpacked, unpacked, and unpacked, just like it has been for the last 2,000 years. It's also an indication, here, of...well, I would say, of the transmutation of sacrifice into an increasingly psychological form—which is a development that we've tracked all the way through the Old Testament, up until this particular point, first acted out, then represented in ritual—those would be the rituals of sacrifice—then laid out in the story, then turned into a psychological phenomena, so that, now, we're capable of making sacrifices in abstraction, to conceptualize a future that we want, to let go of the things that are stopping us from moving forward, and to free ourselves from the chains of our original preconceptions. That's laid out in these old stories, as the optimal pathway of being.

There's a philosopher of science named [Karl Popper](#)—a very sensible and down-to-earth person, who was talking about thinking, and its nature. He thought about thinking in a Darwinian fashion. He said that the purpose of thinking is to let your thoughts die instead of you. It's a brilliant notion: You can conjure up a representation of yourself. You can conjure up a variety of potential representations of yourself, in the future. You can lay out how those future representations of yourself are likely to prevail or fail. You can cull the potential yous in the future that will fail, and then you can embody the ones that will succeed. You do that while, simultaneously, conjuring up a representation of your current state, and determining for yourself—because of your undo suffering—which elements of your pathetic being need to be given up, so that you can move forward into that future. What is it that you're aiming at, with that work, and with that sacrifice? That's the ultimate question. That's the question I was trying to address, in that writing. What is it that you're trying to do? You're trying to improve the future. You believe that the future can be improved. You believe that it can be improved as a consequence of our sacrificial work. So, once again, what are the necessary limits to that? I would say that we don't know. I would say, as well, that that's actually something that the entire corpus of Biblical stories is desperately trying to figure out and articulate. We conjured up this remarkable idea: The future exists. We can see it, even though it's only

potential. We can adjust our behaviour, in the present, in order to maximize our probability of success in the future. How best to do that? Well, the idea is something like, don't hesitate to offer the ultimate sacrifice, if you want the future to turn out ultimately well. Now, obviously, that idea is clothed in metaphysical speculation and religious imagery. But it still remains an intensely practical issue. What is it that you could contract for, let's say, if you were willing to give up everything about you that's weak and unworthy?

There's continual hints of that in the Old Testament. What happens with Noah, of course, is that he establishes the proper covenant with God—the proper contract with Being, let's say—and thrives, as a consequence. And then Abraham does the same thing. There's a strong intimation that that's how the world is set right. That idea develops and magnifies, as the stories progress, into something like the concept of Heaven on Earth—the notion being that the proper sacrificial attitude produces a psychological state, and then a social state, that's a manifestation of that attitude, that decreases the probability that the world will careen into Hell, and increases the probability that people will live high-quality, meaningful, private lives, in a society that's balanced and capable of supporting that. None of that seems, to me, to be questionable, really. I also don't think it's anything that people don't actually know.

People have told me, many times, that, when they listen to me talk, they're hearing things that they already knew, but didn't know how to say. It's something like that. This is one of those things that I think is exactly like that. I think it's at the very core of our moral knowledge, which is our behavioural and perceptual knowledge. Let's get this straight: moral knowledge is no trivial matter. It's knowledge about how it is that you orient yourself in the world. There's no more profoundly necessary form of knowledge. It's predicated on the knowledge that we have to make sacrifices. We know that we have to aim at what's good. So then why is it that we don't aim at what's best, and make the sacrifices that are necessary, in order to bring that into place?

It seems to me that, in some sense, that's self-evident. The question is why we don't do it. But there's an answer to that, too, already, in the material that we've covered. Life is hard, and it hurts people. It's rife with limitation. Some of it's arbitrary, and some of it's unjust. Some of it's malevolent, which is even worse, and something that I haven't talked about, at all, in this lecture. It's not surprising that a combination of vicissitude can turn people against Being. But I think, even when that happens—and, even when people have the kind of history that, if they revealed to you, you would say, 'well, it's no wonder you turned out

that, if they revealed to you, you would say, 'well, it's no wonder you turned out that way'—the people who turn out that way still know that it's wrong. They still know that, however deep their own suffering—however arbitrary their own suffering, however much that's caused by the malevolence of others, as well as the tragedy of existence—that does not, in any way, justify their turning away from the Good. And I believe everyone knows that—I believe that they know it implicitly, even if they don't allow themselves to know it explicitly. And I believe that, if they violate that idea, then they violate themselves. They end up in Cain's position, which is the position of the man who's been given a punishment that is too great to bear.

"And the angel said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen. "And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice. So Abraham returned unto his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba. And it came to pass after these things, that it was told Abraham, saying, Behold, Milcah, she hath also born children unto thy brother Nahor; and Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old: these were the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died in Kirjatharba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her."

Well, I don't exactly know what to do, now. Hah. I'll review what we've covered, and then I'll bring this to a close. We can have some more questions than would be usual, tonight.

What have we established, by this point? The stories that have been revealed, so far, contain the idea that there's something divine, that's analogous to the human capacity for communication and attention, and that operates at the genesis of Being itself. That's the initial account from the Old Testament. It's an account

that places the role of spirit centrally in the nature of Being. I'm not exactly sure what to make of that, because, in some ways, I'm as materialistically oriented as modern people typically are. But the stories make sense to me, in many ways. The idea that there's something world creating about human conscious, and that that's akin, in some sense, to the divine force that called order out of chaos at the beginning of time, seems, to me, to be a very powerful, metaphysical idea. It also seems, to me, to be an idea that is, immovably, at the foundation of Western culture. Our entire legal system, our society, our mutual expectations—all of that—is conditioned, to the final degree, by our presupposition that each of us has an intrinsic value that transcends the local conditions of our Being. It's with that presupposition that we've been able to establish a society that functions well, and has its current characterization. That's an unlikely occurrence, and it's a nontrivial reality. I don't see any way out of that conclusion. I don't see anything that it can easily be replaced with.

So, God calls order into being, out of chaos, at the beginning of time, and it attributes to human beings the same essential capacity. Then we turn to Adam and Eve, in the garden, and they're unconscious, by all appearances—allied tightly with God, but unconscious. They don't seem aware of the future. They don't seem aware of themselves. They don't seem aware of their own vulnerability. They make the fatal error of having their eyes opened. They discover their own vulnerability. They also discover their capacity for evil. We reviewed that, to some degree. What's the association? Because it's the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—the fruit of which they eat. What's the association between the discovery of vulnerability and the emergence of moral knowledge? As far as I can tell, it's something like, you actually don't know how to be evil, or to be good, until you're actually aware, consciously, of your own vulnerability, because the essence of evil is the exploitation of vulnerability—perhaps for the sake of that exploitation. I can't understand how to hurt someone, until I know exactly how I can be hurt myself. And I can't understand how I can be hurt myself, until I become cognizant of my mortal limitations—until I understand what brings me pain; until I understand the suffering that goes along with my mortal limitations: inevitable death, and the suffering that goes along with that. With the accrual of the knowledge of mortality, and good and evil, Adam and Eve are cast out of Paradise, and history begins.

That seems right, to me, because I don't think that history did begin before human beings became self-conscious. So there's something about that that's right. History doesn't really begin until people wake up and start to build. We could still



history doesn't really begin until people work and start to build. We would still be ensconced in, essentially, an animal existence, until we're aware of the future, and start to buttress ourselves against it—start to wear clothing, build buildings, make cities—all in consequence of having become aware of the fact that we're fragile, and that the future is a dangerous place. So that seems, to me, to be existentially correct.

And then we have the story of Cain and Abel, brilliantly placed immediately afterwards. Those are the first two people in history, essentially. They make sacrifices, so that goes along with the idea of the discovery, and necessity, of work, and the discovery of the future. And then exactly what you'd expect happens: one segment of mankind, let's say, makes the sacrifices properly, and prevails, and the other segment makes the sacrifices improperly, and fails. That's perfectly reasonable, given what you see around you, because that's what seems to happen all the time. And then, more interestingly, I would say that the sacrificial failure produces embitterment, and that embitterment produces a hatred for Being, and a desire for revenge. That seems perfectly appropriate. When I look at people who are bitter, and want revenge, it's generally because their sacrificial efforts have failed. Now, I'm loathe to say that that's a matter of their own doing—although, sometimes, it clearly is. The embittered and vengeful complain to God, and blame him for the structure of existence.

I read about the [Columbine massacre](#) and the kids who undertook it. That'll make your hair stand on end, if you want to read something that will really disturb you. Reading Eric Harris' writings will really disturb you. No matter how much you know about human beings, reading Eric Harris' writings will disturb you. Eric is Cain, you know? He says it, straightforwardly: he hates human beings; he hates Being itself. He would destroy everything, if it was within his power to do that. And, of course, him and his colleague were motivated to produce far more carnage than they managed, that day. What was successful was only a fraction of what they had planned. And Harris said, very straightforwardly, that he had set himself up as the judge of Being, and that it lacked all utility, in his eyes. Human beings, certainly, should all be removed from the face of existence, because of their pathology, and because of the fundamental horrors of Being itself. So there's nothing in the Cain and Abel story that isn't real. It's real. Cain complains to God, as people will, when their dreams are dashed. And that goes for people who don't believe in God, too. It doesn't really matter. It's harder, I suppose, if you're atheist, to figure out who to blame. But that doesn't mean that the sentiment is any different, right? The same

drama is being enacted: you shake your fist at the structure of being, rather than at God Himself. But it doesn't make any difference, except in the details.

So God responds to Cain, and tells him that he's got no right to judge Being, before he gets his sacrificial house in order. And, even worse, he says that Cain is the architect of his own downfall—that he invited catastrophe into his own house, willingly, entered into a creative union with it, and, therefore, brought about his own demise. It's that additional self-knowledge—imagine you're facing the failures of your life, and let's say that you had a failed life. You're bitter about that, and then you meditate upon it. You think, 'why has this come about?' And then you think, 'well, perhaps I did something wrong.'

[Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn](#) wrote [The Gulag Archipelago](#), which is the book that detailed the catastrophes of the Soviet Union, and helped bring it down. There's one part of that book that struck me so viciously, when I read it. He was in the gulag, and he was there for a very long time. He said that he observed a variety of people in the camps, who he really admired. They were rare. They were usually religious believers, in his experience, who were not participating in the pathology of the camps—at all; period; no matter what. He said he learned a lot from watching those people. He had a hard time believing that they could even exist. But he said that one of the things that he was brought to—as a consequence of watching those people live their contract with Goodness out, even under the most horrifying of conditions—was that it was possible that he himself was responsible for his position in the camp.

Now, it's a very dangerous line of argumentation, because who wants to be the one who blames the victim of the catastrophe? You have to be very careful, when you walk down that road. But Solzhenitsyn was speaking about himself. He was a communist, and he arrogantly and forthrightly moved the movement out into the world, and had not fully gone over his life with a fine tooth comb, to find out what mistakes he had made that brought him so low. But his contention, eventually, was that part of the reason he ended up where he ended up was because he, and many others, had completely forfeited their relationship with the truth, and had allowed their society to degenerate into deceit and tyrannical catastrophe, without mounting sufficient opposition. And so he decided, when he was in the camps, to straighten himself out, bit by bit. That culminated in the production of *The Gulag Archipelago*, and that book really demolished, once and for all, any moral credibility that the communist totalitarian systems had left. And so one man, in the depths of catastrophe, who determined through good example, at least in part, to stop lying, produced a book, eventually, that

example, at least in part, to stop lying, produced a book, eventually, that demolished the foundation of the very system that had imprisoned him. That is really worth thinking about. That's one example of the absolute grandeur of the human soul, and the capacity for transformation that it has, when let loose properly on the world.

So let's say you're conceptualizing your own failure, and you meditated on it, and you come to the conclusion that God forced Cain to: 'Hey, not only have things not been going very well for you, but it's actually your fault. And not only that—you brought it on yourself. And not only that—you knew it all the time.' Well, then you might think that you'll wake up, and fly right—you'll get your wings in order, and fly right. But there's no reason to assume that, at all. That's not what happens to Cain. The conclusion just makes him more bitter, and you can understand that, if you think about it for just a second. It's bad enough when something horrible happens to you, but then to have to swallow the additional pill—to have to take in the information that you could have done something different; it was avoidable, and you knew it at the time, and you decided to do it anyways. I think people are in that situation a lot more often than anyone is willing to admit. You have that little voice in the back of your head that says 'don't do it,' and you override it. You know it's arrogance that makes you override it. It's always arrogance. It always warns you. It's always arrogance. 'Yeah, I can get away with it.' It's like, no; you can't. I don't think you ever get away with anything. And maybe your experience has taught you different, but my suspicions are that it hasn't. And if you think it has, well, the other shoe hasn't yet dropped.

So Cain doesn't take the opportunity to let God's wisdom reorient his character. That could have been the outcome. He could have got down on his knees, so to speak, and said, 'oh my God, I've been wrong all along. I've been living improperly. I've been making the wrong sacrifices. Abel deserves everything he has. I got exactly what was coming to me. Could I possibly, now, straighten myself out, live in repentance, and improve my position?' That's not what he did, at all. He said, 'all right. Fair enough. I get it. I'm going to go after the thing I most admire. I'm going to destroy it, and I'm going to do that despite its cost to me, and I'm going to do that just to spite the creator of Being.'

That's exactly what Harris did at Columbine. It's exactly what he says, in fact, in his uncanny writings. It's why the mass murderers always shoot themselves afterwards, and not before. Because you might wonder, 'if you're so upset with the structure of Being, why don't you just commit suicide, in your basement?'

Why do you have to go out and mass murder, before you top it off with a gun to your forehead?’ Well, you don’t make the point as effectively, if you just commit suicide, in your basement. It’s like, ‘my life means nothing to me—but neither does anyone else’s, and neither does the structure of Being itself. I’ll take all my revenge as much as I possibly can, and then, just to show you how little I care, I’ll tap myself off at the end.’ People say, all the time, ‘I don’t understand how that could happen.’ I don’t believe that. I think an hour of real thought about your darkest feelings about existence itself illuminates the pathways to that sort of behaviour quite clearly. I mean, I might be wrong. I might be a darker person than most. Hah. Well, at least, I think there are plenty of people out there who are sufficiently dark to know exactly what I mean, when I’m saying these things. I would also say that, if it doesn’t lead to your understanding how that pathway might be illuminated, then you need to know a lot more about yourself than you actually know, now. Because whatever you might say about someone like Eric Harris, he was a human being, too.

There’s this idea in the New Testament that Christ was he who put the sins of the world onto himself. It’s a very complicated idea, but part of it is associated with the idea that he met the devil in the desert, as well. To take the sins of mankind onto yourself is to understand that within you dwells exactly the same spirit that committed the atrocities at Columbine, and ran the camps at Auschwitz, to actually understand that that’s part and parcel with your makeup, and then to take responsibility for it. I think that, in the aftermath of the terrible 20th century, that’s what we’re left with: we’re left with the necessity to take responsibility for the most terrible aspects of ourselves. And that way, perhaps, we can stop those terrible things from happening, again. That also means that you don’t look for the purveyor of malevolence outside yourself—it isn’t someone else, even though, sometimes, it’s someone else. You know what I mean. There are identifiable perpetrators, but that’s not precisely the point. The point is more that the proper place for the encapsulation of that malevolence—at least, the proper place to start—is within the confines of your own existence—and, perhaps, within the confines of your family. That way you’re not a danger to those that you misapprehend as malevolent and evil, because you won’t get your aim right, to begin with. You’ll identify them improperly, and you’ll take your revenge in a manner that allows you to omit your own responsibility, and to act out your own unconscious desire for revenge, and to move the world just that much closer to Hell.

So Cain kills Abel, and then Cain gives rise to his descendants, one of whom is the first artificer in weapons of war. And then comes the flood, which seems

the first armorer in weapons of war. And then comes the flood, which seems perfectly, miraculously reasonable to me. It's so amazing that the story of Cain and Abel segues into the story of the flood. It is the case that the catastrophes that beset society can best be conceptualized as the spread of individual pathology into the social world, and the magnification of that pathology to the point that everything comes apart. And I truly believe that, if you familiarize yourself with the last hundred years of history, that that's the conclusion that you would derive. The people who are most wise, that I've read, who commented on that, say the same thing, over and over: the key to the prevention of the horrors of Auschwitz and the gulag, in the future, is the reconstruction of the individual soul, at the level of each individual. And that's a terrible message, because it puts the burden on you. But it's an amazing message, because it also means that you could be the source of the process that stops that catastrophe, and malevolence, from ever emerging, again. It's hard for me to imagine that you have anything that could possibly be better to do with the time that you have left.

Well, then we see Noah, who walks with God, and whose generations are in order—which means that he's entered this contract with the Good, let's say, that has the protective function of the ark. He's put his family together, and he can ride out the worst catastrophe. He's actually our ancestor. It's so interesting—these people that get their act together properly, and make a contract with the Good, are constantly presented as the genuine ancestors of mankind. That's a really positive element of the story, as well, and it's one I believe. It hasn't been easy for us to get here. We are the descendants of the great heroes of the past, and if you took all those heroes, and you told their stories, and you distilled their stories into a single story, maybe you'd have a story like the story of Noah, or the story of Abraham—the story of the successful; the story of our forefathers, and not the 'cancer on the planet' that certain people tend to think that we are. And so the goal is to be one of the people like that. There isn't anything better that can possibly be done. The alternative is something like Hell. And so Noah rides out the storm, and that's what everyone wants. You want to ride out the storm. You don't want to be happy, because that'll just happen. But you definitely want to constitute yourself so that you can ride out the storm, because the storm is always coming. So then you're fortified against the worst, and that's what you want, because, well, the best, you can handle—the worst, you have to prepare yourself for.

And then we see the same thing repeated in the story of Abraham, essentially. Abraham makes this contract with the Good, and he constantly renews it. That's his sacrifice, and his worship. He constantly renews it. He has the adventures

that are sufficiently typical of the adventures of a human being who's alive and engaging in the world. He bumps himself up against all the horrors of existence, and yet, the story is told in such a manner that reveals that his primary ethical commitment to the overarching good is sufficient to protect him against the vicissitudes of existence. Well, that's an optimistic story. As a pessimistic person, I appreciate an optimistic story that's believable. There's great demands placed on Abraham. It's not just as if this comes to him as a gift. He has to be willing to sacrifice whatever's necessary in order to maintain that contract. That seems, to me, to be realistic. There's no reason to assume that life isn't so difficult that it actually demands the best from you—that it's actually structured in that manner, and that, if you were willing to reveal the best in you, in response to the vicissitudes of life, that you might actually prevail, and you might actually set things straight around you. Well, what if that was true? That would be a remarkable thing. I can't see how it would not be true, and I can't see that it's not stamped on the soul of everyone who's conscious. I think we all know this perfectly well, although the stories remind us.

Socrates believed that all knowledge was remembering. He believed that the soul, before birth, had all knowledge, and lost it at birth, and then experience reminded the soul of what it already knew. There's something about that that's really true, because you're not just a creature that emerged 30 years ago, or 40 years ago: you're the inheritor of 3.5 billion years worth of biological engineering. You have your nature stamped deeply inside of you—far more deeply than any of us realize. And when you come across these great stories—these reminders—they are reminders of how to Be, properly, and they echo in your soul, because the structure is already there. The external stories are manifestations of the internal reality, and then they're a call to that internal reality, to reveal itself.

Well, and then we come to the end of the Abrahamic stories—at least this section of them—with Sarah's death. Abraham was called upon to make the supreme sacrifice. And, interestingly enough, because he was willing to make the supreme sacrifice, he actually doesn't have to. That's an interesting thing, as well. I believe that it's reasonable, from a psychological perspective, to point out that, the more willing you are to face death, for example, the less likely it is that you're going to have to face it, at least in an ignoble manner. And so with that, then we'll bring this 12-part series to a close.

I think that applause is for everyone. I hate to say that, because it sounds so

New-Agey. Hah. But it really does seem, to me, that this is a participatory exercise, and that it would not be possible for me to go through these stories, without having you here to listen. I always think—when talking to a crowd—that it's a dialog. It's a dialog. You sit, and you listen, and you've all listened. Thank God for that. That gives me a chance to think, and it gives me a chance to watch, and it gives me a chance to interact. You're emblematic of humanity at large. I suppose that's one way of thinking about it. For me to be able to craft what I'm saying so that it has an impact on all of you, here, also means that I can, simultaneously, craft it so that it has an impact that, in principle, can reach far beyond this place. I'm really hoping that one of the things that can start to happen with this, at least, is that we can put our culture back on its firm foundation, because it's something that's desperately needed. In order to do that, we have to understand both the evil and the nobility of the human soul. That's a fundamental truth, and I don't think you can get to the nobility without a sojourn through the evil. I really don't believe that, at all. It's no place for the naive to go. That's for sure. Anyways, I would like to thank you—as you thanked me—for your close and careful attention, and your support, during all of this. It's been really a remarkable experience. It's certainly developed beyond my dreams, so thank you.

### **XIII: Jacob's Ladder**

Thank you very much for showing up again. It's really good to see everybody. One of the things that I've been realizing, as a consequence of going through these stories, is that the degree to which they're about individuals is quite remarkable. I think that's really telling. One of the reasons I prefer Dostoevsky to Tolstoy is because Tolstoy is more of a sociologist. He's more interested in the relationships between groups of people—this is an oversimplification. Obviously, Tolstoy is a great author. But I like Dostoevsky better, because he really delves into the souls of individuals. I think the degree to which all of the stories that we've covered so far in Genesis are about individuals is remarkable. They're quite realistic, which is quite remarkable, too. They're not really romanticized, to any great degree. All of the people regarded as, let's say, patriarchal or matriarchal figures in Genesis have no shortage of ethical flaws, and also no shortage of difficulties in their life. The difficulties are realistic. They're major league problems—like familial catastrophes, famine, war, revenge, hatred, and all of those things. It's not a pretty book. That's one of the things that makes it great—that's one of the things that characterizes great literature: it doesn't present you with a whitewashed view of humanity, or of existence. That's really a relief, I think, because—as you all know, because you're alive—there's no such thing as a whitewashed existence. To be alive is to be in trouble, ethically and existentially.

I've been reading this book, recently. I'll talk about it a little bit later. It's called *Better Never to Have Been*. It was written by a philosopher in South Africa, in Cape Town, named [Benatar](#). That's his last name. He basically argues...I think it's a specious argument. I think it's artificially constructed. But he basically argues that, because life is so full of suffering—even good lives are very much full of suffering—it's wrong to bring children into the world, because the suffering outweighs the good—even in good lives. And it would also be better not to exist, for exactly the same reason.

My sense, in reading the book, is that he came to that conclusion and then wrote the book to justify it, which is actually the reverse of the way that you should write a book. You should have a question when you're writing a book, and it should be a real question. It should be one you don't know the answer to. And then you should be studying and writing like mad, and reading everything you can get your hands on, to see if you can actually grapple with the problem, and



come to some solution. You should walk the reader, as well, through your process of thinking, so that they can come to—well, not necessarily to the same conclusion, but at least track what you're doing.

I don't think that's what Benatar did—I think he wrote it backwards. And so I was thinking about it a lot, because that's actually a question that I've contended with in my writing. There are Mephistophelean or Satanic figures, for example, in Goethe's [Faust](#)—and also Ivan, in [The Brothers Karamazov](#), who basically make the same case: existence is so rife with trouble and suffering that it would be better if it didn't exist, at all. The problem I've had with that—there's a variety of them, but one of the problems I've had with that is what happens if you start to think that way. What I've observed is that people who begin to think that way—that isn't where they stop. They get angry at existence—which is what happened to Cain, as we saw in the Cain and Abel story. And then, the next step is to start taking revenge against existence. That cascades until it's revenge against—well, I think the best way of thinking about it is revenge against God, for the crime of Being—which is, I think, the deepest sort of hatred that you can entertain.

When you're in the grip of a really deep emotion—a really profound emotion, right at the bottom of emotions—you're in something that's like a quasi-religious state. That's more or less independent of your belief, say, in a transcendent deity. You can be in a profoundly emotional state that's as deep as it can be, and it can have religious significance, without that necessarily signifying about a transcendent being. But the problem with that argument is that you can gerrymander it endlessly. First of all, how do you measure suffering, and how do you measure happiness? How do you assign weights to them? There's just no way of doing that. You have to do it arbitrarily. And so you can make an argument that the suffering outweighs the happiness—you just weight the suffering more heavily than you weight the happiness, and that's the end of that. So that's a problem. But I think there's a deeper problem.

I was reading this other book, a while back, as well. It was written by the guy who ran the [Human Genome Project](#). I don't remember what exactly it was called, but it was something like [The Language of God](#). One of the things he referred to—which didn't strike me as hard as it should have, to begin with—was that he thought that one of the phenomena, say, that justified a belief in a transcendent being was something like the moral intuition of human beings—that we have a sense of right and wrong. What happens in Genesis, in the story

of Adam and Eve, is that the story announces the coming of the sense of right and wrong—the knowledge of good and evil. It isn't something we ascribe to animals. It's something that's unique to human beings. Animals can be predators, and they can be gentle, and you can have a relationship with them. But you never think of an evil cat, or an evil wolf, even though they're predatory. But human beings have this capacity to judge between good and evil, right and wrong. It's really an integral part of our being.

I think you can make a biological case for that—as you can make a biological case for most of what is relevant about human beings, because we're biological creatures. But we don't really understand the significance of that. What happens in the story of Adam and Eve is that the realization of the coming to the knowledge of good and evil is actually represented as a shift of cosmic significance. It puts a permanent fracture in the structure of being. If you think of human beings as insignificant ants, on a tiny dust mote, in the middle of an infinite cosmos—a cosmos that cares less for us—then who cares, fundamentally, if human beings have the knowledge to distinguish between good and evil? But, if you give consciousness a central role in Being—and you can make a perfectly reasonable case for that, because without consciousness, there's no Being, as far as anyone can determine. So it may be much more central than we think. I really don't think there's a counterargument to that. Not a solid one. You can state that consciousness is epiphenomenal, the world is fundamentally materialistic, and it doesn't matter that there's consciousness. You can state that, but you can make an equally credible case the other way. Certainly, our lived experience is that consciousness is crucial, obviously, and we treat each other—most of the time—as if we're valuable, conscious beings. We wouldn't give up our consciousness, even though it's often consciousness of suffering.

I think another problem with the book is that it's sort of predicated on the idea that life is for happiness. I don't think that's right, and I don't think that's how people experience life. I might be wrong, but it seems, to me, that people experience life as something like a series of crucial, ethical decisions. It's something like that. I just can't imagine—maybe I'm being naive about this—another being that's like me, in most senses, that isn't constantly wrestling, in some sense, with what the next proper thing to do is. It's not like it's obvious. It's not bloody obvious. It doesn't mean you'll do the right thing, because you don't—lots of times—and you know that, by your own judgement. You're making mistakes, all the time. Sometimes you don't know what you're doing, and maybe it's a mistake, and maybe it isn't. Who's to say? That isn't what I'm

talking about. I'm talking about when you know that what you're doing is wrong, and you go ahead, and you do it anyways. People do that all the time. That's also extremely peculiar. You'd bloody well think that, if you knew it was wrong, and you told yourself that it was wrong, that you just wouldn't do it. But that isn't what you're like, at all. You can tell yourself something is wrong 50 times, and you'll do it the 51st time, and then you'll feel like you deserve to feel, probably. But it doesn't stop you.

I think the other problem with the viewpoint—the idea that the suffering of life eradicates its utility—is that it's predicated on the idea that happiness—or lack of suffering, even—is the right criteria by which to judge life. I don't think that's how we actually experience life. I think what we do, instead, is put ourselves through a series of excruciating moral choices. One of the things that's really significant about the Biblical stories—about the entire implicit philosophy that's embedded in the stories, I think—is that that's how life is presented, in the stories. All of these individuals—first, they're individuals; they're not groups. Second, they're agonizing over their moral choices, all the time. All the time! And they have a relationship with God. It's not a directive relationship, exactly. Even the people to whom God speaks directly—which, I suspect, is not something you exactly want to have happen—even the fact that they have a direct relationship with God doesn't stop them from being tormented, continually, by their moral choices.

And so the world is presented as a moral landscape—not as a place that justified itself by happiness. It's presented as a moral landscape, and people are presented as creatures who traverse through the moral landscape, making ethical decisions that determine the course of the world. That seems, to me, to be right. That's not the same as happiness, by any stretch of the imagination. It's a whole different category of Being. I've thought that through a lot. I think that we do make choices. What we do is contend with the future. The future seems to appear to us as a realm of possibility. That's a more accurate way of thinking about it, than that the future presents itself to us as a realm of determined things. It presents itself as a realm of possibility. There's good choices in that realm, and there's poor choices—or, even, evil choices, in that realm. We're negotiating, continually, deciding which of those choices we're going to bring into Being. That seems, to me, to be phenomenologically indisputable, and we certainly treat each other as if that's what we're doing, because we hold each other responsible for our actions—with some exceptions—and that we're deciding, each moment, whether to make things better or worse. That seems, to me, to be correct. I think that's what these stories illustrate. They don't say that directly—although. I

think it gets more and more explicit, as the narrative unfolds.

Part of the realism of the stories is that the people who are being presented are by no means good—maybe with the exception of Noah. Noah seemed to be a pretty good guy—although, he did get drunk, and end up naked, exposed to his sons, and so forth. But he isn't talked a lot about as a character. It's a pretty compressed story. But Abraham had plenty of problems, not least of which was his inability to leave home, and then his lying about his wife. There's all sorts of mistakes. And then Jacob, who we're going to talk about tonight, is an even more morally ambivalent character—especially at the beginning of the story. He isn't the sort of person that you would pick out—especially if you were a hack writer—as the hero of the story. He does a lot of things that are pretty reprehensible, and it takes him an awful lot of time to learn better. And yet, he's the person who's put forward as the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. It's from this flawed person that the people whose story, you might say, constitutes the fundamental underpinning of our culture. It's from this deeply flawed individual that that group emerges. So you might think of that as a relief, too, because you're no knight in shining armour, with a pure moral past.

People make mistakes of catastrophic proportions, nonstop. That also means that these stories put forward something approximating hope. In their moral realism, they present the heroes of renown—the patriarchs of old, let's say—who are realistic people, who have fits of anger and rage, who are murderous at times, who are deeply, deeply embroiled with family dispute, and who have adulterous affairs. They do all the terrible things that people do. The weird thing is that God is still with them. It isn't obvious what that means, or even if it means anything. But it's not disputable, as far as I can tell, that A, we're conscious—and that consciousness is a transcendent phenomena, which we do not understand—and that the landscape that we traverse through is moral. Every story you ever watch, anything that grips your imagination on the screen, any story that grabs you, is a story of moral striving. It's just not interesting, otherwise. The person has to be confronted with complex moral choices, and then you see the outcome. The good guy does it right, and the bad guy does it badly, and things don't go so well for the bad guy, generally. If it's a bit more sophisticated, the good and the bad are in the same individual. That's a more compelling story.

So we could make the assumption, then, that it might be worthwhile thinking of the world—as it has been thought of, classically—as a theatre upon which the forces of good and evil continually strive for dominance. For the life of me—

especially after I started reading deeply into 20th century history, and all the terrible things that happened in the 20th century, and all the terrible, unbelievably, incomprehensible things that people did to one another—I just couldn't see seeing things any other way, as realistic. I don't think that you can immerse yourself in 20th century history without coming to the conclusion that evil is a reality. If it's a reality—it depends on what you mean by 'reality,' but it's a fundamental enough reality for me. And if it's reality, I don't see how you can escape from the conclusion that the cosmos—as we experience it, at least—is a place of moral striving. That's one of the things that's really illustrated in the story of Jacob. I've found that quite striking.

In the last lecture, I ended with the Abrahamic stories—with the death of Sarah. That was Abraham's wife. We're going to continue from there. Remember that Abraham had a son, Issac. He was asked by God to sacrifice his son, which we talked about in some depth. I was attempting to make the case that the idea of sacrifice was one of humankind's great discoveries. It meant the discovery of the future, essentially, but it also meant the discovery that the future was something that you could make a bargain with: you could give up something now—something impulsive, some pleasure, even a deep pleasure, in the moment—and you could strive, and, hypothetically, you could make a covenant—a bargain—with the future, if your sacrifices were acceptable—and that seemed to mean ethically acceptable. You had to sacrifice the right thing. That vastly increased the probability that, not only you would be successful, let's say, but that your descendants would be, too.

I don't think that's an irrational proposition. You have to leaven it a bit with the realization that, sometimes, you get sliced off at the knees, no matter what, because life has an arbitrary element, and that can't be tossed out. But building in the arbitrary element, we'll say, you still want to think, 'well, what's your best bet?' given a certain amount of randomness. It seems, to me, that conscious, self-aware sacrifice, and proper ethical striving is your best bet. There's another idea that—well, I've always explained it using the movie *Pinocchio* as an example. When Geppetto is trying to make his puppet into a self-aware and autonomous moral agent—which is what he wants, above all else—he aims at the highest Good he can conceive—which is the star that he prays to, essentially—and he hopes for the transformation. There's also something in that that's unutterably profound. Maybe that's somewhat independent of the idea that you have to believe in God. I would also say that what it means to believe in God, in the Old Testament, is by no means clear. That's something I also really want to talk about tonight. It's not obvious what it means. What Geppetto does, at least

aim about tonight. It's not obvious what it means. What Ceppele does, at least, is aim at the highest good at which he can conceive. That's actually been a philosophical definition of God, upon occasion—that God is the highest good of which you conceive. That's different than the idea of a transcendent being, precisely. But it's in line with certain interesting psychoanalytic speculations.

This is one of the things I really liked about Carl Jung. Jung was a radical thinker. It's just beyond belief. I've read a lot of critics of Jung, and I've always got a kick out of them. The things they accuse Jung of are so trivial compared to the things that Jung actually did that it's like accusing a murderer of jaywalking. Jung was unbelievably radical. Here's one of his ideas. He believed that psychotherapy could be replaced by a supreme moral effort. The moral effort would be something like aiming at the Good, and then trying to integrate yourself around that. The Good, at which you aim, would be something approximating what you would be like if you manifested your full potential, and that you'd have a glimmering of what that full potential was. That would be the potential future you. He thought of people as four dimensional entities, essentially—that we're stretched across time, and that you, as a totality across time, including your potential, manifested yourself, also, in the here and now. Part of what your potential manifested itself was something like the voice of conscience, or intuition. It's an amazing idea. It's an amazing idea! Because it's like what you could be in the future beckons to you in the present, and it helps you determine the difference between good and evil. It's a mind boggling idea. I think that it's an idea you have to contend with.

He went further than that. This is also a remarkable idea. He was interested in the symbolic representation of Christ. Psychologically speaking, he thought of Christ as the representation of the ideal potential human. It's something like that. At minimum, that is what Christ was—a symbolic representation of the ideal potential of the human being. For Jung, there was no psychological difference between who you could be—in the future, beckoning to you in the present—and orienting yourself in relationship to Christ. Psychologically, those were the same thing. So that's a pretty mind boggling idea—like, seriously. That's a mind boggling idea, especially when you add the psychological idea that one of the things that characterizes your ideal future self is the ability to make sacrifices—the deeper the sacrifice, the better—and also to recover from the sacrifice, so that's the death and rebirth. The part of you that's most essential to your full flowing, as a being, is your ability to let things go, and then spring back from that—so to die, in some sense, and to be reborn in the service of a higher good. Then, the next part of that is that the direction of the world depends on you

doing that. So not only your own life, but your family's life, and, because we're networked so intently together, the whole panoply of humankind—and, maybe, the structure of the cosmos. You might think, 'well, no,' but it's not so simple.

First of all, one person can wreak an awful lot of havoc. There's no doubt about that. And, as we get more technologically powerful, that becomes even more relevant, important, and crucial. One of the things that Jung said was that we had to wake up, because we are too technologically powerful to be as morally asleep as we are. That seems, to me, to be self-evident. Yeah, for sure; that's true. We're half asleep, with nuclear bombs. It's seriously not a good idea.

And then you might ask yourself, too, 'well, what is the ultimate potential of a fully developed human being?' We certainly know that you have admiration for people who are more developed, rather than less developed—that just happens automatically—or you have resentment. But that's ok. It's the same thing; it doesn't matter. But it's not like you can't identify them. You can identify them. They're put forward to you in drama, fiction, and all of that, constantly. So that's another form of moral intuition. You can discern the wheat from the chaff, let's say.

The other thing that I was thinking about that's worth consideration, too, is that—and maybe this is petty, but I don't think it is. Somebody asked me the other day if I believed in miracles. I hate being asked questions like that, you know? It's also people asking, 'do you believe in God?' I don't know what they mean when they say that, so I don't know what to answer. I don't think we're necessarily going to talk about the same thing. In any case, I said yes. I have a variety of reasons for that, but one of them is that the consensus among physicists is that we can track the origin of the cosmos to something like a hundred million of a millionth of a second after the Big Bang. It's so close to the Big Bang that the difference is literally infinitesimal. But the consensus is that, before that—whatever that is—the laws of physics themselves break down. Well, what do you call an event that exists outside the laws of physics? By definition, that's a miracle. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean that there's a transcended deity that caused the event. That's a separate issue. But it does imply a barrier, of some sort, beyond which we can't go, where some other set of rules apply. I find that interesting, as well.

All right. So Sarah dies, and Abraham makes a bargain with the Hittites, to purchase a burial place for her. They offer it as a gift, and he insists upon paying

for it. It's a little story that basically indicates two things: that Abraham was the kind of guy that you trust, very much, when you see him, and that, even if something is offered to him as a gift, he's going to do everything to be reciprocal about it. So it's not a massively important part of the story, but it's in keeping with the same narrative flow. Ephron, who's a Hittite, offers a burial place, as a gift. Abraham says, 'no, you have to let me pay for it.' And Ephron says he will, and that works out very well. So he has a good burial place for his wife. And then Abraham decides that Isaac needs a wife, and so he sends his eldest servant to Mesopotamia, to find a wife for Isaac. There's a strange ritual that's performed. It says in the story that the servant places his hand under Abraham's thigh, to swear. But that isn't really what it means. It means that he places his hand...I don't know exactly how to say this properly. Well, use your imagination, how about that? The idea—as far as I can tell—is that he's swearing on the future people. It's something like that. So that's sort of what 'testify' means. Think about the root. Well, I'm not kidding! I'm not kidding. That is the derivation, right? It is the derivation. So, anyways, this is a serious issue. The servant has to go and find Isaac a good wife, and he wants him to find Isaac a wife who is willing to accept the same fundamental belief system, which is something like the belief in a God that is a unity, rather than a plurality.

The other thing that Jung was very insistent upon was that there was a relationship between polytheism and psychological confusion, and monotheism and psychological unification. I really liked that idea, too. You are a plurality—that's one of the things the psychoanalysts were really good at figuring out, and that the cognitive scientists haven't touched, yet. They're way behind the psychoanalysts in that element of thinking. You are composed of subpersonalities, which all have their own desires, and their own viewpoint, and their own thoughts, and their own perceptions. They're in a war with each other, constantly—maybe even a Darwinian war. It's been portrayed that way by certain neuroscientists, and that one of the goals of life is to integrate all of that plurality into a hierarchical, ethical structure that has some canonical ethic at the pinnacle. We've talked a little bit about that. It's not obvious what should be at the pinnacle, but we can guess at it. It's that which we admire. That's one way of thinking about it. It's that which describes fair play across a sequence of games. That's another good way of thinking about it. It's the heroic ideal, but it's combined with generosity—because the mythological hero goes out, into the unknown, slays the dragon, and gets the gold. But then, he comes back to the community and distributes what's found. So it's courage, plus generosity. And so all of that interior struggling that you're doing is an attempt to bang yourself



against the world with challenge, constantly; to hit everything together, like you're beating on a piece of iron—to cure it, let's say, so that you're not an internal contradiction; you're not a mass of competing gods. It's something like that. Because it's just too psychologically stressful, hard on everyone else, and impossible for them to get along with you, if you're one thing in one moment and another thing in another moment.

So, anyways, Abraham insists that Isaac finds a wife from among people who are likely to carry forward the monotheistic tradition. I'm not sure that the monotheistic tradition is actually distinguishable from the individualist tradition. I think they might be the same thing, at different levels of analysis, because 'individual' means 'undivided,' in some sense. To be an individual means to be one thing. The other thing that mitigates against the idea of life as happiness is that it isn't obvious that happiness is what moulds and shapes you. It's something more like optimal challenge, voluntarily undertaken. It's something like that. I think that's echoed in the idea that everyone has a moral obligation to raise their cross—to accept the face of their mortality voluntarily. I believe that that's the case. And I do actually think that that's a prerequisite for proper psychological development. If you're not willing to take your mortality on voluntarily, if you're kicking and fighting about it constantly—and you have every reason to; don't get me wrong—then you can't act forthrightly in the world. You're going to be afraid. And when you're afraid, then you can't voluntarily take on a challenge. And then, if you can't voluntarily take on a challenge, then you can't develop.

So, again, life seems to be—if it's a proper life—the voluntary taking on of great challenges. Maybe that's better than happiness. It's certainly more noble. It's not a word we use very much, anymore—the idea of nobility, because we're so obsessed with happiness. But I think happiness—like, if it comes along, man, great. Wonderful. Don't take it lightly, or for granted, because it's fleeting. But the idea that that's what you should be for, in some sense, just seems, to me—if that's what life is for, then maybe it shouldn't be. Maybe that's correct, because that isn't what life is. But it isn't obvious, to me, that that's what life should be. I mean, if you really love someone—like your son, let's say—would you say, 'well, I hope he has a happy life,' or would you say, 'I hope he accomplishes great things?' It seems, to me, that that's better: the accomplishing of great things. Because that's admirable, you know? It's like, a happy person is a happy person, but a noble person is an admirable person. That's better, man. And so maybe there are better things than happiness. And so you can't judge Being on the basis of the ratio of suffering to pleasure—something like that. And I don't

the basis of the idea of suffering to pleasure—something like that. And I don't think we do that. I don't believe we do that. Comedians are happy, right? But everybody doesn't aspire to be a comedian, and you don't watch comedy all the time, even though you laugh nonstop, more or less, if the comedian is funny. You want to get your teeth into something.

It also seems, to me—and this is one of the reasons that I liked existential philosophy. The existentialists believe—it's sort of an original sin idea. They thought we came into the world already with an ethical burden laid upon us, and that we had a felt sense that it was necessary for us to justify our Being—and that, if we didn't do that, then we weren't authentic to ourselves; we weren't moving towards individuality; we weren't sustaining the community; we weren't living properly. That idea was deeply embedded in people, as part of their ordinary experience. That also seems, to me, to be accurate. I've dealt with lots of people—say, in my clinical practice. They will come and say 'I wish I wasn't so unhappy,' but they don't usually come and say 'I wish I was happier.' Those things aren't the same. And then, when you talk to people who are having trouble, they want to straighten things out, and figure out how to do them right. It's something like that. That's their primary goal.

So, anyways, Abraham sends his eldest servant off to the place that God has granted him, to find a wife. Interestingly, the borders of the promised land are quite similar to the current borders of Israel—these are estimates—and, I mean, that's not a fluke, obviously. But it's interesting to see the concordance between these ancient stories and the present day world. I thought that was very interesting. And it shows, once again—you think the past is the past, but it's not. It's still here; it's embedded in the present—just like the future, in some ways, is folded up inside the present, waiting to unfold. The past is all folded up inside the present, too. So, anyways, the servant goes to the land that he's been charged to go to. He's trying to figure out, 'how in the world am I going to find a good wife for Isaac? I don't know any of these people.' So he has this little dialog that's presented in the form of prayer. He thinks, 'well, I'm going to go to the place where people get water, and water the animals, because that's the place where everyone gathers, so that's a good place to find someone.' It's not a place of fun and lightness and realization and impulsivity. It's a place for life-sustaining work. He thinks, something like, 'well, what would a decent girl do, at a watering place?' He thought, 'well, maybe she would offer a stranger some water—and, also, offer to water the camels.' That would be brave—to approach the stranger—and then generous, and then indicative of the willingness to make an effort. When you know that a camel—I think he took 10 camels. It's quite a

few camels, anyways, not just one. A camel can drink 20 gallons of water. The woman who's drawing water from the well—who turns out to be Rebekah—which is hard, because water's heavy, and you have to lift it up...It's 10 camels, so that's like 200 gallons of water. She has to put herself out a fair bit to make this stranger happy. That's what happens. Then the servant has brought along gifts, and that sort of thing. Anyways, to make a long story short, Rebekah agrees to come back with the servant, and to marry Isaac.

Then she gets pregnant, and she has twins. This is an interesting thing: the twins fight inside her. She can tell that they're not getting along. This is an echo of Cain and Abel. There's a mythological motif that the Jungians have called 'the hostile brothers.' You see them all the time: Batman and the Joker are hostile brothers, and Thor and Loki. It's an unbelievably common motif. The ultimate hostile brothers are Christ and Satan—that's the archetypal representation of the hostile brothers: the ultimate good and the ultimate evil. So it's an echo of the Cain and Abel story—although, it's a little more complex, I would say, from a literary point of view, because it isn't obvious which of these brothers is Cain, and which is Abel. They have parts of both in each of them. So Esau—who turns out to be one of the brothers—and Jacob—who turns out to be the other—both have their admirable qualities, and their faults.

Anyways, Esau is born first, but Jacob has his heel. So there's a fight within the womb, to see who would emerge first. That's relevant because the firstborn had a special status—well, has a special status in many communities, especially agricultural communities. These people were more herds-people, but if you divide your property equally among your children, then, in like three generations, everyone has like one goat, and everybody starves to death. The same thing happens with land. So one of the ways that traditional communities solve that is that they just give almost everything to the firstborn, and then everyone else knows, well, you go out and do whatever you can. It's kind of arbitrary and unfair, but at least it's predictably arbitrary and unfair, instead of doom over four generations. So it actually mattered to be the firstborn, and God generally favours the firstborn. You might think, 'what is it about being born first that's so relevant, apart from the cultural practice of a more generous inheritance?' Well, I would say that the firstborn is the model for the leader of the family, because the firstborn child—if there's a number of siblings—A, should take care of the siblings, at least to some degree, but also should be a role model for them. So it's like a natural position of leadership. But there's a psychologization of the firstborn, in these stories, because God often passes over the firstborn in favour of a later born child. He seems to do that on the basis of

the firstborn in favour of a later-born child. He seems to do that on the basis of moral character, essentially. So there's an idea that there's a natural proclivity for leadership that's just a biological fact, that would be associated with being a firstborn. But there's an element of characterological development that transcended that. It's more important to be spiritually a firstborn, let's say, than biologically a firstborn. God recognizes that, continually, in these stories, and inverts the natural order, and favours a later-born, who's done more work in regards to characterological development.

I've talked to lots of business people about leadership. There's a literature on leadership, but it's not a good literature. It's pretty shallow, partly because it's not that easy to define leadership, and partly because people have different temperaments, and different temperaments can be leaders. They just do it in different ways. There's something in common about being a leader, though. I would say one is that, if you're an actual leader, you know where you're going. Because what are you going to do, lead people in circles? They'll follow you, but you're not a leader; you're just a charlatan. So you have to know where you're going, then you have to be able to communicate that. And then people have to be able to trust you, because people aren't that stupid—at least not for a long period of time. And then, where you're going has to have some value, because, otherwise, why would anyone want to go along with you? And then you might say, 'well, what are the attributes, then, that make you a leader?' I would say that they're characterological, fundamentally.

This is not naive optimism or casual moralizing. It has nothing to do with that. We know, for example, that conscientiousness, the personality trait, is a good predictor of long-term success, in most occupations—not all, but most—and that one of the things that's associated with conscientiousness is that people keep their word; they're trustworthy. That's certainly one element of a leader—certainly across any reasonable amount of time. You have to be able to trust the person. They can even be harsh. It doesn't matter, because you can see harsh leaders and kind leaders. But as long as they do what they say they will do, then you can follow them, and you know that the future payoff is secure. Something like that. So the idea that characterological development is more important to leadership than primogeniture is a very crucial, psychological realization—that it's characterological development that makes you favoured by God.

I do think we've forgotten this, in many ways, because there isn't a lot of emphasis in our education system on characterological development. That's very, very surprising, to me. I think it's partly because, in our fractured society,

we can't agree on what constitutes a reasonable characterological goal. So we just throw up our hands and don't educate our kids, to any degree, at all—especially in schools—about what an admirable person is like, or even let them know that, maybe, you should actually try to be one, and that that's the most important possible thing that you could learn.

I also think—and I think this is laid out very thoroughly in the Biblical stories, as well—if there are enough people who are admirable, then things work, and if there aren't, then things are terrible. You get wiped out. Remember when Abraham is bargaining with God, with regards to Sodom and Gomorrah? He asks God to save the city, if there's like 40 admirable people, right? I don't want to say 'good,' because 'good' has been corrupted, in some sense, by casual usage. I mean admirable, noble people. I think Abraham bargains God down to like 10—if there's 10 of them in the city, the city won't be destroyed. That's not very many in the city. There's an interesting idea there: there doesn't have to be that many people in a group, who have their act together. But zero is the wrong number. And if it's zero, then we're seriously in trouble. I think that goes along with the idea of the [Pareto principle](#), in economics, too—that it's a small minority of people who do most of the productive work, in any given domain. So, a small number of properly behaving people might have enough of an impact to keep everything moving. That might actually be true, but it can't fall below some crucial level. I do think that we're in some danger of allowing it to fall below some crucial level. Our society seems to be at war, in some ways, against the idea of the individual, and individual character per se. I think that's absolutely catastrophic.

That's part of the reason that I'm doing these Biblical lectures. I've known for a long time that the moral presuppositions of a culture are instantiated in its stories. They're not instantiated in its explicit philosophy. There might be a layer of explicit philosophy—and, of course, there is in the West—and a layer of explicit Law. But, underneath that, there are stories. There isn't anything under the stories, except behaviour. But that's so implicit that it doesn't even actually count. It's not a cognitive operation. And so these are the stories that are underneath our culture. So there better be something to them. That's what we hope. But, more importantly, maybe we shouldn't toss them away, without knowing what they mean. If we toss them away, we're throwing away everything we depend on, as far as I can tell. We will pay for it. We'll pay for it individually, because we'll be weak. If you're not firm in your convictions, then someone else, who's firm in their convictions—you're their puppet, instantly.

And then you're a puppet of your own doubts, because, unless you have conviction, you're going to generate doubts like mad—because everyone does—and then the doubts will win. You'll be paralyzed, because there'll be fifty percent of you moving forward, with fifty percent of you frozen stiff. That'll be enough just to lodge you in place.

Ok, so there's a psychologization of the idea of leadership—which is very important—and then it's associated with the idea of characterological development. It's associated with the idea of struggle, not happiness. It's also associated with this Abrahamic idea, which I really liked, which is something that's been very useful, to me, as a consequence of doing these lectures. Remember, at the beginning of the Abrahamic stories, Abraham is like in his mother's basement, and God says, 'get the hell out of there; get out in the world, where you belong. Go do something difficult, because what you're doing isn't acceptable.' The first thing he does is go somewhere where there's a famine. Then he goes to a tyranny. It's pretty funny. He follows God's call, and it's not like sweetness and light and paradise, immediately. It's nothing like that. It's instantaneous combat, of the most difficult kind. But Abraham does, in fact, follow that impulse. Here's another thing that made me an advocate of psychoanalytic thinking. It was the sort of thing that started to terrify me about what the human psyche was actually like. I started to understand that not only were we like an amalgam of relatively automatous subpersonalities—each of which had the possibility of gaining control—but that we're also victim, you might say—or beneficiary—of impulses that are beyond our conscious formulation, understanding, or capacity to resist.

Here's a funny story. I was talking to one of my Patreon people, online, this week. He was a committed atheist. That's fine. Lots of atheists are very honest people, and they're atheists because they don't know how to reconcile what they know with traditional claims, let's say—they're not willing to mangle them together. There might be cynicism and all that associated with it, as well. He said he was entranced by these Biblical lectures, which is pretty weird. He said that, if someone would've told him a year ago that he would be obsessed with a sequence of Biblical lectures, he would've told them that they were mad. So we had a bit of a discussion about that. This is an interesting thing, you know—and he mentioned this—he said, something like, 'you don't choose your interests. They choose you.' That's really worth thinking about, too. It's really hard to get interested in something you're not interested in, even if you know there's a good reason for it. You're studying for an exam; you find the material boring. Anything will be more interesting than the study—even though you know that's

...anything more interesting than the study. Even though you know what you need to do, you can't voluntarily grab yourself by the scruff of the neck, and shake yourself, and say, 'sit down and concentrate.' Your mind'll just go everywhere. But then, if you're interested in something—and even if it's something that you shouldn't be interested in, because that happens all the time—then it's like you're laser-focused, man. You can pay attention forever. You can work until you're exhausted. You won't even notice it, and you remember everything.

If you can't control your interests, what does? Man, I tell you, you can think about that for a very long time. Jung talked about the spirit [Mercurius](#). Mercury is the winged messenger of the gods. Here's how he conceptualized it psychologically. He thought this is what the ancient people—who thought about Mercury as the winged messenger of the gods—were trying to state psychologically. Your interest flits around. There's something that captures it, and moves your interest from place to place. Like, if you walk into a bookstore, you'll get interested in a particular book. It's as if the book grips you, because you don't know why you're interested in that—you might, but often you don't know why you're interested in that book. Your interest is flitting around. So that's Mercury; the thing that makes your interest flicker around; the winged messenger of the gods. Mercury is the messenger of the gods because it's the things behind the scenes, psychologically, that are manipulating your attention. For Jung, those were equivalent, in some sense, to the lost gods.

For Jung, your interest was being manipulated, behind the scenes, by unseen forces that were associated with your characterological development across time. That was the manifestation of the Self. So the Self is the potential you, let's say. The way it operates in the present is by gripping your interest and directing it somewhere. That's part of the instinct of self-realization. It's a mind boggling idea. I think it's correct; I can't see how it can't be correct. It doesn't mean I understand it completely, but it certainly seems to be phenomenologically correct. I mean, the potential that you are has to manifest itself somehow, in the here and now. It has to. What better way than by directing your attention? Maybe you get attracted to this person. Maybe you admire this person. That happens with kids a lot—they'll admire someone, and copy them. You can see that that's, obviously, part of their developmental progression. It's a form of hero-worship. Kids are very imitative, and they hero-worship at the drop of a hat. They're entranced by the next stage of development. If they see someone who embodies the next stage of development—especially if it's in the zone of proximal development, it's something they could achieve, stretching a bit—then

they start to imitate them, and act like them. Well, adults are no different. We do it at a, perhaps, more abstract and sophisticated level.

Ok, so Jacob and Esau are hostile brothers; they're like Cain and Abel, except a mixture of Cain and Abel. They're very different. "Esau was red and covered with hair; he was a hunter, a man of the field." So he's like your basic jock; he's extroverted; he's outgoing; he's really tough; he's extraordinarily masculine; he hunts, and he's a real favourite of his father. Jacob isn't. He's a dweller in tents. It says, "Isaac loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob." That's a big problem. There's a Freudian element to this: this family is now divided, because one child is the favourite of the mother—that's Jacob—and one child is the favourite of the father. Jacob is kind of a mother's boy, to use a rather archaic phrase—and certainly not as admirable, from his father's perspective, as Esau, who's a tough guy, who goes out with a bow and arrow, and wanders around in the plains and brings animals home. He's a tough guy. But there's this discord in the family, because one parent prefers one child, and the other parent prefers the other. It's obvious, from the story, that the parents do not communicate about this, because they really take sides. So there's a split in the family. That's, I think, very realistic. One of the things that you do learn, if you have a family—and, of course, most of you do—is that there's deep divisions within families, very, very frequently, that no one will ever talk about—or even think about, often, because it's too painful to think about.

Freud was clearly his mother's favourite. The family sacrificed a lot, including some of the potential ambitions of the other children, in order to put Sigmund Freud up on a pedestal, and advance his education. It worked. I mean, he turned into a great man, but there was a cost, to his siblings. Freud himself said that there was something about being the favourite of the mother that gave a person additional confidence throughout their life. There's something to be said about that. Even someone like [Erik Erikson](#) noted that the first bonding with the mother was the place where trust—maybe even trust in the goodness of existence—was established.

Anyways, Jacob is Rachel's favourite, and Esau is Isaac's favourite. Now, Esau—being extroverted, let's say—is also a bit impulsive. He's a man of action. He's not a forward-thinker. But he's also doing hard work. He goes out, and he's hunting, and he's worn out. He comes home, and he's faint with hunger. Jacob is at home, cooking. He's boiling up red lentils. Esau comes in, from the hunt, and he's like half starving to death. He's sitting there, and the aroma of these red lentils reaches him. He's exhausted and he tells Jacob that he wants some of this



lentils reaches him. He's exhausted, and he tells Jacob that he wants some of this stew. Jacob, who's being a pain in the neck, fundamentally, basically says, no—there's a teasing thing going on, here—and won't give him any. You have to imagine this, because it's not laid out explicitly in the story, but there's some dispute about whether Esau gets to have lunch. Jacob finally says, 'I'll give you some, but you have to give me your birthright.' You think Esau must say something like, 'well, to hell with it. Take it, you son of a bitch. Take it—just give me some damn stew.' It's something like that. So that's what happens. But, you know, with these archaic people, once you made a statement like that, you were done. That was it. And so Esau sells his birthright. This turns out to be incredibly significant.

There's a bit of a twist to it. Esau eats the red lentils, and from then on his name is 'red.' You gotta use your imagination, a bit. People are making fun of him, right? That's why they're calling him 'red.' I mean, he's already red—we established that—but no one was calling him 'red' before this. So, for the rest of his life, every time he goes out amongst his friends and family, they call him 'red,' and kind of snicker, because he's the half-famished idiot who sold his birthright for a bowl of lentils. It's not that funny, actually. Esau's not happy about this. So what does it mean? It means, 'don't sell the future for the desires of the present, and don't be casual about what you have.' And then there's an archetypal element to this, too.

[Benson](#) says, "various have been the opinions what this birthright was which Esau sold, but the most probable is, that, together with the right of sacrificing"—so determining what should be sacrificed, and when—"and being the priest of the family, it included the peculiar blessing promised to the seed of Abraham, that of being a progenitor of the Messiah, and the heir of the special promises of God, respecting Christ's kingdom. It was at least typical of spiritual privileges, those of the firstborn that are written in heaven."

Well, that's a lot harsher than meets the eye, to begin with. There's a very interesting, deep moral story, there. Esau does the opposite of a sacrifice. It's the reverse, right? He sacrifices the future for the present. And so the story basically says—the way it's laid out across stories—is that, if you're the sort of person that sacrifices the future to the present, then that eradicates the possibility that you will bring the most noble being into existence. That's what it means. Again, this is the psychological significance of the Biblical stories. So that's a bad thing to do, if you want to realize your potential, let's say.

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You don't do reverse sacrifices. That's a very bad idea. And so Esau really did himself in by being too attached to the present, without a vision of the future. So he's too in the moment. And he pays a heavy price for it. First of all, he loses his birthright, and his double inheritance—so there's a practical consequence—and then there's a spiritual consequence. And then, well, he's been made a fool of by his brother. Jacob means 'supplanter,' by the way. That's what the name means, and Jacob is always trying to usurp Esau, as we will see. And so Jacob gets one over on him, and that doesn't make an older brother happy, when a younger brother gets something over on him. That's for sure. And then he loses the opportunity to be the progenitor of the messiah. He probably didn't realize that, precisely, but it's kind of rough, that.

There's a statement in Matthew 16:26: "for what has a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" It's an echo of the same idea. You think, 'well, what does this idea of 'soul' mean?" It's not intellect. It's something like consciousness allied with character, I think. I think the reason that it's valued so much—you gotta ask yourself, what do you really have, when it comes down to it? So life is suffering, let's say. You can pile up worldly goods. The God in the Old Testament doesn't seem to have anything against that really, right? The people who he favours seem to prosper quite nicely in the world. But they also have to make a choice between whether they're going to fundamentally sustain their character, or whether they're going to prosper in the world, when push comes to shove. The idea, constantly, is that what you have in the world that allows you the best possible defense against the suffering that's intrinsic to Being is your character. That's what you have. Period.

I don't think there is anything that's more psychologically true than that. First of all, your relationships with others depend on your character, and, certainly, this is part of the story of Noah's ark. His generations were perfect, so he had a tight familial arrangement. Everyone trusted each other. That's a big deal, if you hit a rocky patch in your life, right? And it's character that determines that. If you're generous and honest and all of those things, and people know they can rely on you—assuming they're not resentful, because that's a whole different story—they're going to come to your aid, when it's necessary. They're going to pull together with you. When people are really after you, for one reason or another, and they're accusing you of all sorts of things—and you're guilty, because you have a past that's laden with characterological errors—then it's very easy for people to take you down. They'll poke until they hit a place where you're guilty, and then you're done because you'll do yourself in with your own judgement

and then you're done, because you trust yourself, with your own judgement. So, Esau makes a very big mistake

There's a sacrificial idea, here, too. Now and then you're going to be faced with a situation where it's something you really want, or it's your character. Maybe you'll have to lie about something. You'll think, 'ah, what difference does it make? I'll lie about it.' Jacob does this. But there's a bunch of problems with that. One is that, well, now you know that you're the sort of person that will, in fact, deceive yourself about the nature of reality, if something shiny is dangled in front of you. That's not good, because it undermines your faith in yourself, and when you're really in trouble—they call that [the dark night of the soul](#)—that's what you've got: you've got whether or not you can trust yourself, and that's it. And so, if you've betrayed yourself, in that manner, then you weaken yourself under the worst possible circumstances. That's really not a good thing. This is practical advice. It's not casual moralizing. There's very little casual moralizing, in these stories.

In the next part of the story, there's some parallels with Abraham. That's built into the narrative, I think, because Isaac is Abraham's descendant, so we have to keep the narrative echoing forward, otherwise it loses its continuity. There's a famine in the land that Isaac's in. God tells him to stay the course, anyways, repeating the promise he gave to Abraham—although, Isaac goes to Abimelech, also telling the King and people that Rebekah was his sister. That's exactly what Abraham did, when he went to Egypt. There's another echo, there. It's as if the story's being told for a second time, essentially. That's supposed to remind you of the previous story. But they're careless; the king sees that Rebecca and Isaac are intimate together, and, luckily, he doesn't have them put to death. He just tells everybody in the kingdom that they're to be left the hell alone. Isaac prospers in that land—just like Abraham did, in Egypt—until the Philistines ask him to leave. He's just getting too rich and powerful; things are going too well for him, so he's asked to leave. In the meantime, Esau gets married. This is a funny little story. "He marries two women who give grief to Isaac and Rebekah." Whoever Esau marries, they're not popular with their in-laws. Not in the least. That actually becomes relevant, a little later, because they drive Rebecca quite mad. So I get a kick out of that, because that's very common. It's not easy to integrate new people into your family, and to hope that will go smoothly. It's actually one of the real catastrophes of life: you have a kid, and maybe you get along with them—and maybe you don't, but let's assume you do—but then they marry someone that you just don't like—or maybe that you think is wrong for them. That's really rough. What are you going to do about that? You're basically

screwed both ways: if you have the person you love around, you have to put up with this horrendous creature that they allied themselves with—if you get rid of them completely, you don't have your child anymore. It's a very, very difficult position. That's another example of the realism, I think, of the stories.

Now Isaac, who's hypothetically on his deathbed, asks Esau to hunt for venison, because he likes venison, and he's happy that his son is a hunter. Rebecca overhears this, so she conspires with Jacob to slaughter two small goats and make his father some stew, because he wants Esau to make him stew out of venison. But Rebecca, who's being, let's say, slightly deceitful—or horribly lying, to be more accurate—conspires with Jacob. So Jacob kills two little goats—kids—and boils up a stew. Then he puts on some goat skins—because Esau is a hairy character—and Rebecca dresses Jacob in Esau's clothing, because Isaac can't see very well, at this point. Then Jacob goes into his father's room, with the stew.

He tries to disguise his voice, but it doesn't work very well. Isaac asks him to come closer. Jacob puts out his arm with the goat's skin on it, and Isaac smells him, too. He smells like Esau—which, maybe, wasn't the best thing—and feels like him. And so, because Isaac thinks he's on his deathbed, he decides to deliver a blessing to—hypothetically—Esau, but it's Jacob. That's a big deal, too. As I said before, with these ancient people, it appeared that, once you said something, you didn't get to take it back. You couldn't say, 'well, look, you deceived me, so it doesn't count.' They weren't, maybe, as—well, 'weak' is one way of thinking about it. Another way is that they weren't as attentive to context. If I make you a deal, and then it turns out that you betrayed me, I may feel that the deal is no longer valid, because the assumption was that you were being honest, and that violates the whole spirit. But that isn't how these people thought. They said, 'once you promised, man, you promised.' And that was that.

So Isaac blesses Jacob. He says, "let God give you the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: let people serve you, and nations bow down to you: be lord over thy brethren"—that's going to be rough on Esau—"and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee."

So there's quite a remarkable painting of that. There's Rebecca. She's looking pretty old, and Isaac's looking pretty blind. Jacob's taking directions from his mother, and we might say that he's, perhaps, a little old to be taking moral lessons from his mother. especially given how she's acting. It's a pretty ugly

scene, altogether, especially that we also know that Jacob already tricked Esau out of his birthright. Now, he's taken the birthright, and he's taken the blessing. As I said, Jacob, he turns out to be the father of Israel. He's a reprehensible character. These are major league betrayals, that he's engaging in. It's not trivial. He really, really pulls the rug out from under his brother. You could say, 'well, Esau is not as awake as he might be. He's kind of a wild man,' and fair enough. But it certainly seems, to me, that the predominant moral error falls on Jacob's shoulders. It's very treacherous behaviour, what he's doing.

Esau shows up, and he's got a nice stag for his dad, but it's a little late for that. He states that his brother was rightly named Jacob, which means 'supplanter,' because he's been deceived, twice. Esau's asking, fundamentally, if there's anything, at all, left over for him. Isaac can't give him the same blessing, because that's already been given. So he has to think of something else. Isaac says, "behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren I have given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son? And Esau said unto his father, Have you even one blessing for me, my father? bless me, also. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept."

We already know that Esau's a pretty tough guy, by all appearances. He's out there, hunting on his own, camping. He's no pushover. The fact that this reduces him to tears is an indication of the magnitude of the betrayal. And Isaac says, "behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; and by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck. And Esau hated Jacob because of his blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob." So, fundamentally, if Isaac dies, or when he dies, then we'll mourn for him. Then, Jacob better look the hell out, because it's serious death coming his way.

He's got a point. In Dante's *Inferno*—I think I mentioned this, at one point. Dante's *Inferno* is a very interesting story. It's a descent into hell. The popular conception of hell was partly based on Dante's imagination—on his work. What Dante was trying to do was to discover the hierarchical structure of evil. You might think there's a hierarchical structure of good—some things are better than other things—but there's also a hierarchical structure of evil—some evils are greater than other evils. He put betrayal in the lowest part of hell. So, if you were

betraying people, you were right beside Satan himself. I think that's good; that's very smart. Well, Dante was a genius, after all. I think the reason for that is that—you see, if someone trusts you, they're laying their vulnerability open to you. Now, they might just be naive. We won't think about that. You're just a child, if you're naive. You can still be betrayed. But if you're an adult, and you trust, it's often because—if you're actually an adult—you willingly open yourself up, knowing that you could be hurt, because you're not naive, anymore. You decided to trust, and you say, 'I'll open myself up. I know that I'm laying myself open to you, if you choose to use that power.' If you've been hurt as a child, or as a naive person, you might say, 'why should I ever trust again?' That's a really good question. The reason you trust again, once you're an adult, is because you're courageous. It's an act of courage, to trust. The reason it's useful is because, if you trust someone, you open the door to reciprocity and negotiation and cooperation, and you entice the best part of the person forward. And so it's a courageous act. But then, if you betray someone, you've taken the best part of them—which is the part that will courageously trust, with open eyes—and you've stuck a dagger in that. You purposefully damaged the best part of them. And so that's why it's such an egregious fault.

It's often that people don't recover from that sort of thing. If you betray someone badly enough, you can damage them—you can give them post-traumatic stress disorder, if you really put your mind to it. That's just not a psychological disorder. If you have post-traumatic stress disorder, it produces permanent neurological alterations, that make you more neurotic—more sensitive to negative emotions—for the rest of your life. You can recover from it, to some degree, but stress will tend to reinstantiate the PTSD. So you hurt someone, and it's not merely psychological—not that psychological is 'merely'—but it's not merely psychological. It's fundamental physiological damage.

Anyways, Jacob's smart enough to get out of there—which, also, is not really a testament to his integrity, right? I mean, he's done these terrible things—at the behest of his mother—because he wants power, and he wants to get it, without deserving it. He finally goes too far, and he hightails it out of there, to another family member—to his mother's brother. It's not exactly the world's most heroic story. That's for sure. Now, there's an interlude, here. This is a really interesting interlude. It's the story of Jacob's Ladder.

He's off to visit Laban, who's his mother's brother, and, on the way, he has a sleep. "And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set: and he took of the stones of that place. and put them for his

pillow"—which seems to indicate very bad planning, on his part—"and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed."

The story of Jacob's Ladder has really possessed the imagination of the West. There's a reason for that. It's because it's an archetypal story. The idea of a ladder that reaches to heaven is one of the oldest ideas of mankind. You find it widely distributed among the shamanic cultures, for example, and it's a hallmark of psychedelic experience—that's another way of thinking about it—which is a very peculiar thing. So there's one representation of the ladder—you see God up at the top, there, peeking out from the clouds. That's sort of where we get the idea that God is in heaven, and that heaven's up in the sky. That's an easy story to make fun of, because we've gone up to the moon, and there's no God there. But this is not a reasonable way of conceptualizing what these experiences are about. These experiences—what this is, the opening up there, is more like an opening into an alternate dimension. That's a better way of thinking about it.

From the Judeo-Christian perspective, one of the things you have to understand is that God is beyond space and time. He's not in the universe. He's outside the universe, in some manner. The idea that you have an experience of God, and it's up—the up is the best that the human imagination can do with what's, essentially, a form of extradimensional experience. That's the way to conceptualize it. And these experiences aren't rare. They make up the core of the shamanic tradition. There's an intrusion of the ancient shamanic tradition, which is tens of thousands of years old, into the Biblical stories, at this point. Now, why Jacob had an, essentially, shamanic experience is very hard to tell, because we don't know what these old people were up to. We don't know how much of the archaic religious tradition was still extant at that point in time. But we certainly do know that our ancient forebears were using psychedelic substances, constantly—like the *amanita muscaria* mushrooms, which were widely used in India, before they became extinct. That's the theory, anyways. That seems to be the basis of the chemical [soma](#), of which much has been written about.

So we hear of this as a dream, or as a vision, and, perhaps, that's what it was. But perhaps that wasn't what it was, either. Perhaps it was an experience that was induced by the same processes that shamanic people have always induced

these experiences. So we're going to go through this, a little bit. That's the visions, and there's messengers going up and down. One way you can conceptualize that is psychologically—as we already discussed—that there are forces within you that are active and alive. You can think of them, in some sense, as messengers of the higher self. You can think about this as an image of a psychological reality. And so we can stick with that.

Here's some of the representations that have been made. I really like the one on the right. That's William Blake. I like the helix idea, and I don't think that that's a fluke. There are helixes and double helixes in all sorts of imagery—very ancient, and very modern. They're associated with healing, and with this kind of vision. You see it in the Blake representation. God is associated with—well, really, with the sun, and with light. You see that on the left, as well—that, wherever God is, is where light is. That's a very interesting idea, as far as I'm concerned. There's some other representations—one by [Chagall](#). There's this idea that there's the possibility of opening up a line of communication between the human psyche and the transcendent divine. There's a great image of Christ as [pantocrator](#), so creator of the world. It was one of the first mosaics—if I remember correctly, and I wish I remembered where it was, but I don't. It's a very interesting image. I'm having a carving made of it, at the moment, by a friend of mine. You see Christ's face portrayed in a medieval manner. He's holding a book. It symbolizes the importance of the book, as a means of transmitting wisdom. His face is very asymmetrical. The eyes are different—one side and the other. One half of the face represents the human part, and the other side of the face represents the divine part. I also think about that psychologically, because I do think that that's the right way to conceptualize human beings. There's an aspect of us that's mortal, human, and limited. But there's an aspect of us that's transcendent and divine, as well. It's latent, in some sense, but there are times when it manifests itself.

This is not speculation. This is like the oldest experience of human beings. Now, it's not necessarily an easy experience to have, but it's reported everywhere, and it can be reliably induced—as we discussed before—by chemical means. I don't know what that means, exactly. We talked a little bit about [psilocybin mushrooms](#), for example. You could say that the mystical experiences that have been invoked in the newest experiments down at John Hopkins are derangements or forms of psychosis because they have some similarity to psychotic experiences. Although, psychotic people were given LSD in the '60s, and they always said that was something different than what they were having. If



they give psychotic people amphetamines, it can make them worse. So they're biochemically separate, and we know that.

The thing that's so interesting about the psilocybin experiences is that they reliably produced mystical experiences that the people ranked as among the most important experiences of their life—and, among those who have the psychedelic experience, positive things happen to them. And so that kind of messes with the whole psychosis theory, right? Because, well, what are you going to do? Are you going to claim that you give someone a pill, they have a psychotic break, and then they're healthier? It's like, no. That isn't how psychotic breaks work. You're not healthier after having one. You're like a broken egg, and it's not easy to put you back together. And we know that people all over the world have discovered every manner of psychedelic substance that you could possibly—well, you can imagine that there were lots of hungry people, wandering the earth, for a long time, and they ate every damn thing they could get their hands on. Now and then, something very peculiar happened, as a consequence.

So I'm going to tell you a little bit about the shamanic tradition, because it's associated with Jacob's Ladder. According to [Mircea Eliade](#), who was a great historian of religion—a compatriot of Jung's, and they influenced each other, quite substantially. Eliade believed that shamanism that used psychedelics was a degeneration of the original, more pure shamanism. But I think later scholarship has demonstrated that that's incorrect—that the shamanic ritual per se was a direct consequence of the discovery and ritual use of psychedelic substances. Anyways, Eliade identified three pathways to shamanism. The shaman in a tribe was more educated than the typical person, with a larger vocabulary, and was the repository of the oral tradition—and so learned all the stories that had been passed down by word of mouth. People, by the way, can very, very accurately tell the same story across generations. That's been quite well documented. And people who can't read really can remember, because what else are they going to do? Their memories are far greater than modern people's memories. We can forget everything, because we can just look it up. But they remembered things, because they had no choice.

My father knew someone who was illiterate—and who couldn't use numbers, either—when he grew up in Saskatchewan, 60 years ago. He had sheep, if I remember correctly. And, although he couldn't count, he knew if one of his sheep was missing, because he knew all of the sheep. He could tell just by looking if one of the sheep was missing, but he couldn't count. So people who don't have our particular set of skills—first of all, they're not stupid. Second

don't have our particular set of skills—first of all, they're not stupid. Second, they have other skills, that we don't understand, and that fill in the gaps.

Eliade identified spontaneous vocation. So you had the spirit of a shaman, let's say—so you're probably extremely high in openness, from a modern perspective. Hereditary transmission—so your father was a shaman, and your grandfather was a shaman, and so forth, and so you got initiated into that process. Or a personal quest. This is from Eliade: "In Siberia, the youth who is called to be a shaman attracts attention by his strange behavior; for example, he seeks solitude, becomes absent-minded, loves to roam in the woods or unfrequented places, has visions, and sings in his sleep."

You know, if you put someone in a place where you're deprived—from a sensory perspective—normal people will hallucinate quite quickly. So it seems that what happens is that, if you dampen down the sensory input, then you start to become aware of the background processes of the mind. It's like the signal to noise ratio: as the noise decreases, some of the background noise becomes signal. You start to become aware of your own internal psychological processes. It's something like that.

"In some instances this period of incubation is marked by quite serious symptoms: among the Yakut, the young man sometimes has fits of fury and easily loses consciousness, hides in the forest, feeds on the bark of trees, throws himself into water and fire, cuts himself with knives."

We went to a [potlatch](#) on northern Vancouver Island, about a year ago. They had this one dance—it was the [Kwakwaka'wakw](#) natives. They had this interesting dance that was the dance of the wild man. The person who invited us was the wild man, and he was dressed up in tree branches, and so forth. He was the person who'd been in the bush too long. He came in as a cannibal. There was genuine cannibalistic rites among these people, not so long ago. He came in as a cannibal, and everybody had to wear this like cedar headdress, because, if you had a cedar headdress on, the cannibal wouldn't take a bite out of you. They actually took this quite seriously. So you should have your cedar headdress on.

So he's looking around the crowd, and there's like 400 people in this place. He could really act, too. He's doing this wild man dance, and then all the women stood up, and started to kind of dance in place and sing. They were taming him. So that was really cool. It was really interesting to see that, because those people have had an unbroken culture for about 13,000 years. That's how long they've

been out on the island, there. It was very interesting to see the dramatization of the domestication of man, by women, laid out in that dance, and in that way. But it was also interesting in relationship to the shamanic tradition, because he came in as a wild man. He had to be re-civilized, in some sense, and brought back down to earth.

"But, by whatever method he may have been designated, a shaman is recognized as such only after having received two methods of instruction. The first is ecstatic (e.g., dreams, trances, visions)."

The other thing that this guy told me—and I have no reason to doubt him. He's also not a literate person, and so has a great memory. He does traditional carving, and he's very good at it. He carved a 53-foot totem pole that's now in front of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. So, if you ever go there, you can go see it. It won't be there forever, but it's there right now. He was taught to carve by his grandparents. He said that he dreamed in—you know what the [Haida](#) images look like? The Kwakwaka'wakws are kind of like the Haida. It's the same sort of imagery. He told me that he dreamed in those images. So, when he dreams, that's the form that the things he dreams about takes. He also said that he would talk to his grandparents in his dreams. So, if he was working on a piece of wood and trying to figure out how to carve it, and he ran into a particularly difficult problem, he'd dream, and he'd have a conversation with his grandparents, and they'd help him figure out how to solve the problem. Then he'd wake up, and he'd go carve. The thing is, he told me these things sort of matter-of-factly. It wasn't like he was telling me these weird things that happened to him—although, he was doing that, to some degree. I asked him a lot of questions about what he carved, and what it all meant. That was just part of his explanation of how he did it.

He carved me a couple of doors, that I have in my house. One of them's quite interesting—well, the two make a panel. There's an underwater scene, and under the water there's a bunch of mythical monsters. Some of them are killer whales. I think there's an octopus down there, carved in this particular style. He said that the other thing that happens to him when he dreams is that he goes down to the bottom of the water, where these mythological creatures are, and he gets inspiration from them. So I thought that was extremely interesting, too. We don't know what a mind that isn't hyper-literate, like our minds are—because we're so bombarded by external stimuli that we have no idea what the natural mind is like, really. And so it was quite interesting to listen to that, and also to see the consequences, because he's quite a great carver.

"The first is ecstatic (e.g., dreams, trances, visions); the second is traditional (e.g., shamanic techniques, names and functions of the spirits, mythology and genealogy of the clan, secret language. This twofold teaching, imparted by the spirits and the old master shamans, constitutes initiation."

Modern people have a problem with that because we don't really get initiated. But let's say that we're each on a quest, of some sort. You wouldn't be here, I don't think, if you weren't, because why else would you be here? So you're on a quest, of some sort, to figure out the struggle with the meaning of life, let's say. You don't want to do that alone, because you only last like 70 years, and good luck figuring it out on your own. It's just not going to happen; it's too complicated, and you'll be too isolated. If it's just you, that's insanity. No one can stand that. So you hope that other people have things to tell you, and your culture has things to tell you. So you're on a quest, maybe not with the same intensity as a shamanic initiate, but let's give you some credit. And then, you're also trying to understand the wisdom of the past. That's the second part of this. It's like, ok, you're a human being, and human beings have been telling stories for a long period of time, trying to figure out what's going on—trying to figure out how to orient themselves in the world. Partly what you're doing, here, is exactly what the shamanic initiate does in the second part of the process, which is to expose yourself, to the degree that you can, to "the names and functions of the spirits, mythology and genealogy of the clan, and a secret language. This twofold teaching, imparted by the spirits and the old master shamans, constitutes initiation."

So that's a rebirth, right? That's what an initiation is: it's being born again. That's a birth of the spirit, rather than a birth of the body. It's something like that. So it's the rebirth of an integrated psyche—a psyche that's individual, but also grounded in the wisdom of common humanity. And that makes you strong—at least, it makes you stronger. There's a limit to your strength, but God only knows, to some degree, what that limit is. People can be unbelievably tough—unbelievably tough. I think it's even the more admirable for human beings to be tough, because we're so conscious of how we can be hurt, and we're so conscious of what that hurt can lead to. You can have your family taken away from you, and you can be destroyed. The fact that you can be courageous in the face of that, at all, is something that is absolutely unbelievable. People deserve a lot more credit, I think, than people give themselves. The fact that we can be honourable under conditions of life, death, and suffering is a testament to the

human spirit.

There's a profound antihuman ethos, I think, that pervades our culture—that considers human beings cancers on the planet, and that there should be less of us. It's the same spirit that motivated the guy who wrote the book about *Better to Have Never Been*. I don't see it that way. I think people do pretty well, for having their leg caught in a bear trap, and their head caught in a vise. They're actually doing pretty well, because life is really hard. The fact that we're not absolutely brutal and murderous all the time is really something remarkable, given what we actually have to contend with—that we can go out of our way to be honest and generous and altruistic, and to care for each other under unbelievably dire circumstances, and to act nobly, sometimes, under the most trying conditions. In Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, he tells story after story of people who acted abysmally, but also people who, under the worst threats imaginable, never sacrificed their character. Reading about that is really—well, it really makes you wonder. That's what it does.

"The future shamans among the Tungus, as they approach maturity, go through a hysterical or hysteroid crisis, but sometimes their vocation manifests itself at an earlier age—the boy runs away into the mountains and remains there for a week or more, feeding on animals, which he tears to pieces with his teeth. He returns to the village, filthy, bloodstained, and it is only after ten or more days have passed that he begins to babble incoherent words. "The strange behavior of future shamans has not failed to attract the attention of scholars, and from the middle of the past century several attempts have been made to explain the phenomenon of shamanism as a mental disorder. But the problem was wrongly put. For on the one hand, it is not true that shamans always are or always have to be neuropathics"—mentally deranged—"on the other hand"—and this is the critical issue—"those among them who had been ill become shamans precisely because they had succeeded in becoming cured."

So it's not the descent into this strange, subterranean psychological state that constitutes the transformation that makes the shaman, but it's the emergence back up out of that. That's the journey to the underworld, and a rebirth. There's this great book by a guy named [Henri Ellenberger](#). He was an existential psychoanalyst and philosopher. He wrote a book called [The Discovery of the Unconscious](#), which I would highly recommend. It's on [my list of recommended readings](#). It is a great book. If you want to know about the psychoanalytic tradition, it's the best introduction there is. He discusses Adler, Jung, and Freud,

and does a very credible job of all three, but also takes the history of psychoanalytic thought back 300 or 400 years before Freud. It's very engaging reading, and very interesting.

One of the things Ellenberger points out quite clearly is—and he associated this, to some degree, with the shamanic tradition—that both Freud and Jung—Jung, in particular—underwent very intense periods of psychological disturbance, let's say. I would say what was happening was that, because they were questioning their axioms at the most fundamental level, they were deranging their cognitive and perceptual structures. Jung was also experimenting with imaginative techniques, and visionary techniques, which he did a lot. There was a period of his life where he was having a constant stream of visions, which he wrote down in a book called [The Red Book](#). But, at the same time, he was still functioning as a psychiatrist, and operating normally in the world. People have suggested that what he had was a psychotic break, but that's ridiculous, because that's not how it works, man. If you're having a psychotic break, you're not being an effective psychiatrist. Those things do not go together, especially not for a long period of time. So there's the possibility of extreme experience, without psychopathology.

Ellenberger says much the same thing about Freud—and about Charles Darwin, as well, who underwent a terrible period of mental confusion, I would say, as a consequence of formulating his theory of evolution, which was really hard on him, because he was a diehard Christian. He knew what the implications of his theory were, and he didn't know what to do about that. It was very, very hard on him. It's quite common for people of genius to go through an intense psychological crisis, but then resolve it, and the genius is in the resolution. The precondition for the genius is the dissolution, in some sense, because you have to be obsessed with a problem—it has to grip you completely—before you're going to concentrate on it so obsessively that you might come up with a solution. But it's the people who come up with a solution that are the prophets and the shamans, and so forth, and so on. And so this isn't something that only characterizes archaic cultures. We just don't recognize it in our own culture properly, and that's a problem—well, sometimes we do.

You remember that in the Lion King, right? Rafiki shows up—he's the shaman—he brings Simba down that dark tunnel—that's the dark night of the soul. He has him reflect upon himself in the pool. When he reflects on himself deeply, he sees the reflection of his father, then that becomes a thing of cosmic significance. His father appears in the sky—just like God appears to Jacob—and

basically tells him that it's time for him to grow the hell up, and to return to the devastated kingdom, and to set it right. And that's exactly right. We live in the devastated kingdom. That's an eternal truth. It's the responsibility of the individual to grow the hell up, and to set it right. When it's devastated, and when things are not in place, then everyone suffers too much. And that's not good. There's no excuse for not doing something about that, because you don't have anything better to do. Even children's movies tell you this. This is a fun one. This is from the [Eadwine Psalter](#)—9th to 10th century. That's Adam and Eve, but there is speculation that the fruit that they're eating, there, is psilocybin mushrooms, because they're the only kind of mushroom that grows like that. So that's pretty wild. And then, this is the—I think it's called the [Banisteriopsis vine](#), if I remember correctly. It's what [ayahuasca](#) is made out of it. It has this double helix form, which is very, very interesting. Nobody could figure out how the natives made this ayahuasca, which transports people, spiritually, in a very intense manner. There's a whole religion based on it, like a modern religion, as well as an archaic religion.

To make this stuff, they had to take two plants that don't grow anywhere near each other—and there's like a million plants in the Amazon, so how do you figure that out? Nobody knows. And then you have to cook them in this very particular way, for a particular amount of time, before you produce this stuff. One of the plants has DMT in it, which is a very intense psychedelic, but it's very short acting. The other has an MAO inhibitor. So, if you take the DMT, and you take the MAO inhibitor, then the DMT trip lasts for much longer. So that's what these Amazonia natives figured out. No one has any idea how they managed it. If you ask them, they tell you that the plants told them how to do it, which isn't much of an explanation, as far as modern people are concerned. But then, when modern people take the ayahuasca, and the plant, so to speak, starts to talk to them, they're a little less leery about the whole theory that the plants had something to do with this.

I'm loathe to talk about this, because I'm not an advocate for drug use. But, by the same token, you can't ignore empirical data. It's not reasonable. The empirical data is that psychedelic substances can produce mystical experiences, and that those often have a transformative effect. One of the latest studies shows that, if you take people who are dying of cancer, and you give them psilocybin in a sufficient dose to produce a mystical experience, that you radically decrease their fear of death. You gotta think about that, man. That's tough. That's a tough experiment. You just wouldn't expect that—you'd think, you take someone, you



derange them intensely, and then, when they come back—even though they're dying—they're not nearly as afraid of dying. You gotta kind of wake up and smell the roses, when you see something like that. The people who are doing this research are very reliable people.

There's this old idea—it's quite a funny idea, about toadstools. Flies like *Amanita muscaria*, and there's some—this is ridiculous—evidence that they actually like getting stoned. Animals will eat these—reindeer will eat these things, too, and they get pretty tripped out by them. I have this book on psychedelic use among animals, which is a small book. There's this idea that toads used to sit around the *Amanita muscaria* and wait for the stoned flies to buzz badly around them, and then snap them up. So that's pretty funny, I think.

There are mushrooms in the U.S. that are the oldest organisms on the planet. There's one mushroom—I can't remember where it is, but it covers something like...God, I don't know—hundreds of square miles. It's like this huge thing, because it's all underground, and they have these very complex networks of [mycelia](#), they're called, and they think the thing is like 150,000 years old. Something like that. There's plenty of things about the world that we don't know. That's for sure.

That's the chemical makeup of the classic psychedelics. They all have the same fundamental structure. This is [serotonin](#). That's one of the major brain neurotransmitters. What happens with the psychedelics is that they alter the brain function by altering the neurochemical utilization of serotonin, and change the manner in which the serotonergic systems work. The serotonin system is a very basic system. When you're an embryo, and your brain is developing, it is the serotonin projections that basically orchestrate the development of your brain. They're very, very archaic circuits. And this is the paper, that I think I stole this from: "Psilocybin can occasion mystical-type experiences having substantial and sustained personal meaning and spiritual significance."

Why? That's a good question. So here's a question for you. It is beyond dispute that human beings are capable of religious experience. Why? Why is that, exactly? You can associate psychosis, but that doesn't work. The theory doesn't hold water. It's not the same thing. So why is it there, exactly? It's not an easy thing to figure out. I'm always trying to figure out a biological explanation for everything, because if you want to find something to stand on, you want to make sure that it can resist a challenge. So, if I can find an explanation for something that's reductionistic and materialistic and biological, then I'm going for that.



That's a tough one. Consciousness is a tough one. The moral sense is a tough one. They're not easy things to crack. The Big Bang is a tough one. A cynic might say that, sometimes, when people are close to suicide, they'll have a mystical experience. Maybe you say, 'well, it's a last-ditch attempt of your brain into deluding you into thinking that your life has some significance.' That's a plausible theory, but I don't think it accounts for the generality of the phenomena. So I don't buy it.

What happens in the shamanic experience is that the shaman has the experience of being reduced to a skeleton, first—so a very realistic death experience. Then, the next thing that happens is that he finds himself in a place where he's communing with his ancestral spirits. After that, there's the climbing of something like the ladder—Jacob's Ladder, say—and an encounter with God, for all intents and purposes. It's a very widespread phenomena. It's the world tree. I've thought about this a lot, trying to figure out what this represents.

"According to a Yakut informant, the spirits carry the future shaman to Hell and shut him in a house for three years. Here he undergoes his initiation; the spirits cut off his head (which they set off to one side, for the novice must watch his own dismemberment with his own eyes)"—dissolution to the primary elements, in some sense—"and hack his body to bits, which are later distributed among the spirits of various sicknesses. It is only on this condition that the future shaman will obtain the power of healing. His bones are then covered with new flesh, and in some cases he is also given new blood." So there's a death and resurrection experience that's associated with the shamanic ritual. "We are here in the presence of a very ancient religious idea, which belongs to the hunter culture. Bone symbolizes the final roots of animal life, the mold from which the flesh continually rises. It is from the bone that men and animals are reborn, for a time, they maintain themselves in an existence of the flesh; then they die, and their 'life' is reduced to the essence concentrated in the skeleton, from which they will be born again." That's a good graphic representation of the experience.

That's an old painting by [Hieronymus Bosch](#), if I remember correctly. I really like that because it's reminiscent of the near death experiences that you hear people describe. They're quite common, as well. I had a very weird experience, once. I don't think I've told you this story. I was assessing someone who had gone through a car windshield, and he was very depressed—it had happened a long time before, but he was very depressed. The insurance company was basically accusing him of malingering, because he'd been depressed for so long, and he'd sort of healed up, and everything. But, if your left hemisphere is

damaged—especially the front part of your left hemisphere—then you can be in a chronic state of depression, because the left hemisphere, generally speaking, is responsible for positive emotion. If it isn't there, it's like, 'negative emotion, for you.'

I went and assessed him, and I was giving him this...I think it was the [Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory](#), which is kind of a standard personality test, and half psychopathology test. He was filling it out. He was a very serious, middle-aged guy. Nothing about him was New-Agey, in the least. He was like an accountant—I think, in fact, he was an accountant, if I remember correctly. There was one question, and it said, 'my spirit has left my body.' I think that's right; it's very close. He stopped, and he asked me, 'I'm not sure how to answer this.' I said, 'why?' He said, 'well, after I went through the car windshield, I was in a coma for three weeks.'" Something like that. I think he said he died three times.

He couldn't remember anything during that period of time, and he couldn't remember the car accident. That's retrograde amnesia, and that's quite common with head injuries. He said that, during one of those experiences—and this is all he remembered from the hospital—he came out of his body, went down the long tunnel of light—you've heard these near-death experiences—and then saw his family members there, saw the heavenly light, and then realized that it wasn't his time, and came back to his body. Now, what was interesting about this guy was that—well, first of all, I didn't ask him about this. He basically volunteered this story, and it was instigated by this question. He didn't know that anybody else had ever had an experience like that, because I asked him if he'd ever heard of anything like that. He said 'no,' so that was interesting. But what really was interesting was—how the hell did he remember that? Because he had amnesia during that entire period of time. He was in a bloody comma, so he didn't remember anything. But he remembered that.

Those experiences are more common than you think. There's a painting of one, which is quite interesting. That's like a tunnel to heaven. It's the same basic idea. There's a little bit more suffering going on in this one, I think, but that's pretty typical of Hieronymus Bosch. I don't know what was up with that guy, but he was one strange character. The Scandinavians have this idea that [the world is a tree](#). I've been thinking about that a lot. I think that the tree idea—a tree is something that is grounded in matter, let's say, and that reaches up to heaven. In the Scandinavian tree, at the bottom, there's a cool idea. See, this tree

is constantly being gnawed by snakes—you can sort of see the snakes at the bottom—and, at the same time, it's being watered. The water makes the tree grow at the same rate that the snakes gnaw on its roots, so it's like a yin-yang idea: there's continual chaotic destruction and replacement, at the basis of whatever this process is. But the tree seems, to me, to be a representation—it's like a different dimensional space. That's what's trying to be represented.

Imagine that you're structured—if you take powers of ten magnification, say, human beings are about in the middle of the tiniest thing and the largest thing, if you do it by powers of ten. And so you have a subatomic level, and then an atomic level, and then a molecular level, and then a level of organs, and then there's you, and then there's your family, and then so on—all the way up the tree, fundamentally. And so I think that this tree represents—and this is the thing that the shaman moves up and down—this different view of dimensionality. It's something like that. I think that what happens in the psychedelic experience is that consciousness can travel up and down that structure. It's something like that. And maybe not only up and down it, but maybe right through it. I know that's a radical claim—it's a really radical claim, and it might be wrong. It's probably wrong, even, because most radical claims are wrong. But I'm not so sure it's wrong.

Here's something cool. So that's the Scandinavian world tree. And that was drawn by an anthropologist who visited the tribes in the Amazon that use ayahuasca. Now, it's a tree with snakes. That's reminiscent of the story in Adam and Eve, obviously, but it's also reminiscent of our primate dwelling place, right? That was basically our ancestral home—a tree surrounded by snakes, and the snakes like to eat us. This was like 50 million years ago. It's really a long time ago. And so we don't know where these images come from, precisely, but I do have a suspicion that we use the circuitry that we developed to detect snakes to represent the unknown as such.

A snake is something that comes out of the unknown. We evolved out of an animal substructure, and so we had to get our biological cognitive structure from somewhere. We have this capacity of thinking about the absolutely unknown, and the terrors that are involved in that—horrors that can emerge from what we don't understand. It stands perfectly to reason that we would use circuits that were already pre-developed for that, and that this is a reasonable representation of the existential structure of the world.

I think I might have shown you this before but it never ceases to amaze me this

I think I might have shown you this before, but it never ceases to amaze me, this picture. My son drew this when he was eight. On the right, you see mushroom houses. They have the names of all his friends on them. So that's order, right? And then, on the left side, you see chaos, there. That little orange thing is a bug. And then there's a river that runs right down the middle. So that's like the yin-yang symbol—the divide in the middle. So that's quite cool. And then there it is: Jacob's Ladder. It's like Jack and the Beanstalk, which is like another variant of the same shamanic story. There are bugs going up and down it. They're taking messages from heaven. Up there, in heaven, it's got the sun, and there's Saint Peter. I don't know where in the world he got this. It's not like he had a lot of religious education—despite me. And then there's the pearly gates, up there, and that was the world. He had a very well-ordered psyche, I would say—and still does. But, when he drew that, it just absolutely blew me away. I had it laminated, and it's in my office, because, well, what the hell do you make of that? That's why. Well, you sort of get the picture, there: the great cathedrals of Europe are like a forest in stone. They try to represent the light coming through the leaves. It's sort of our ancestral forest home, but it's transformed into these great sculptures of stone. They produce awe because of the combination of light and darkness and colour, but also, I think, for the same reason that huge trees produce awe in people. We don't want them cut down; they seem sacred, in some sense, and perhaps they are.

It also seemed, to me—this is an intuition—that the architects of these great cathedrals were trying to express something that's deep and structural. They're trying to express the idea that, if Being was constituted properly, then it would be organized from the subatomic level, all the way up to the highest cosmic level, perfectly, so every layer stacked on top of each other, without any contradictions. That would be an ideal mode of being. Everything would come together, under those circumstances. That's what's being expressed in these cathedrals—it's not all that's being expressed, because they're also shaped like a cross. The idea is that the center of the cross, which is the center of suffering, is also the place of the individual—the place where the transformation takes place. That's all built into the architecture, as well.

Then there's the tree-like structures that make us up, stretched down to the tiniest realities; the microcosm. There's this idea—it's all represented in the same way. Again, it's the idea—especially the mandala, up in the top right—of this perfection of crystalline structure. That's what the yogis are trying to attain. When they organize their bodies, they're trying to get every single layer of their being aligned properly. You can kind of see an echo of that in—that's a Tibetan

sand painting, if I remember correctly, on the bottom left. The idea is that, if you get yourself aligned properly, then information can flow along that tree that's you, without impediment. It's something like that. That would be like a state of optimal health, and both physical and spiritual exercises can put you in that state. Those are all clouds of ideas that surround this idea of a ladder to heaven. And so Jacob is talking to God, and God says, "...behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. "And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it." That's a sacrifice. "And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee."

That's a pretty good place to stop. Now I'll just conclude. So you have this very morally ambivalent character. So far, pretty much everything he's done, that we're familiar with, is not good. He's betrayed his brother horribly, twice—badly enough so that his brother wants to kill him, and everyone can kind of sympathize with his brother. And then he runs away, essentially, because his mother tells him to, which is not exactly a testament to his character. Despite that, strangely enough, he has this experience. That's heartening, I guess, and that's the point.

People are predisposed to terrible error. There's no doubt about that. When I was writing my latest book, a friend of mine, [Norman Doidge](#), wrote the forward. He's written a couple of great books. He's Jewish. He read some of what I'd written, and he took me to task for making the God of the Old Testament—from a Christian perspective—too harsh and unforgiving. I rewrote a fair bit of it because of his criticism, and because of what I've learned from doing these lectures. It's not exactly right. What happens in the Old Testament is, if you screw up—especially if you know you do, and you decide you're not going to do anything about it, so it's conscious and deliberate—then look the hell out; you are in serious trouble. I actually think that's psychologically accurate.

One of the things Jung pointed out—and this always struck me—is that, if you don't know what you're doing—this is actually in the [Gospel of Thomas](#), as well, interestingly enough. It's one of the [Gnostic Gospels](#). Christ tells his followers, something like, 'if you make a mistake and you don't know what you're doing, then you'll be forgiven for it. But if you make a mistake knowing what you're doing, and you do it anyways...then good luck to you.' I think that's psychologically accurate.

One of the things that's very interesting about the judgemental God in the Old Testament, however, is that he can be bargained with. And, even if you make mistakes—especially if you're unconscious of them, if you haven't learned yet, let's say—then you always have the opportunity to return to the proper path. People get cynical about that, because there's this mostly Christian idea that you could live a terribly sinful life, but if you repented on your deathbed, it's like, 'heaven, for you.' Well, that sounds like a great deal, right? You can do whatever the hell you want until just before you die—of course, you might not know when that is, so that's a problem—then you can just say 'I'm sorry,' and then everything's forgiven.

But the problem with being cynical about that sort of thing is that it's no trivial matter to repent. To repent means A, you figure out what you actually did, and the worse the things that you did, the more horrible it is to figure it out. It's no joke. There's no genuine repentance without understanding the depth of your depravity. And so, if you lived a particularly reprehensible life, and you come to understand it, I think that, in and of itself, could kill you. It's a terrible thing to wake up and see what you've done, if what you've done is truly terrible. So there's no easy out; it's not an easy out. It's just pure cynicism to associate that idea with an easy out. It's not. But there is that positive idea, continually represented, that the individual is the source of moral choice, and the individual is prone to genuine error and temptation, in a believable and realistic way, but that doesn't sever the relationship between the individual and the divine, and the possibility of further growth. I would say, well, thank God for that, because without that, who would have a chance? The idea that the infinite, as presented in the Old Testament, is merely judgement, is definitely wrong, and is, in fact, something that you can contend with, and bargain with.

I'll close with one thing. One of the things that I learned while I was going through this was the meaning of the name Israel—because Jacob, eventually, gets named 'Israel.' I'm jumping ahead, a little bit, to the next lecture. Jacob is also the father of Israel, and the father of the 12 sons who make up the 12 tribes

also the father of Israel, and the father of the 12 sons who make up the 12 tribes of Israel. But what Israel means is 'he who struggles with God.' That's such an interesting idea because, again, it's a psychological idea. That's why I said, earlier, that it isn't obvious in the Old Testament what it means to believe in God, because what Jacob does is struggle with God. I think that's a really good characterization of an ethical life. If you're trying to lead an ethical life, that's what you're doing: you're struggling. Blind belief isn't helpful, because you don't know what you're believing in. It's just not that helpful. But if you're possessed by the desire to orient yourself properly, but also confused by the existential structure of the world—which we all are—then what you're doing, when you're trying to orient yourself properly in life, is struggling ethically. Jacob actually gets quite hurt. He wrestles with God, literally, and God dislocated his thigh. The idea, there, is 'watch the hell out,' right? The thing that you're contending with is powerful—although you can contend with it. That's the thing that's so interesting. But you do it at some genuine peril, which, I think, is exactly right.

So there's Israel the state, let's say, and Israel the promised land, and all of that, but there's this more important idea—which is, again, a psychological idea—which is that the state of Israel, which is the promised land, is the state that everyone who wrestles with God exists in. That's not happy, naive belief in an eternally blessed afterlife. It's not that; it's not a wish fulfillment. It's to be actively engaged in the difficulties of life, and trying to find the path—because that's what wrestling with God is: trying to find the path. That seems, to me, what belief means, fundamentally, in the Old Testament—perhaps in the New Testament, as well. Belief is expressed in trying to find the path, and that's an ethical struggle. It's a real struggle; it's the struggle of life. So as long as you're willing to engage in that struggle, then, hypothetically, you have the divine behind you. I believe that. I think that's true. The other thing I see is that the people who set things right—so the horrible forces of cosmic destruction don't do us in—are the ones that are struggling ethically. There is a redemptive element to that. I don't think there's any way of being cynical about that. Thank you.

## **XIV: Jacob: Wrestling with God**

The last time I was here—many of you were here, as well—we got halfway through the story of Jacob. I've been digging underneath the story sporadically, since then, to try to find out what other themes are being developed. I've got some things that I think are really interesting to talk about. So we'll get right into it. I'm going to review a little bit, first. We were talking about Jacob. I'll re-update his biography a little bit, so that we can place ourselves in the proper context, before we go on. So his mother, Rebecca, gave birth to twins. The twins, even in her womb, were struggling. Of course, the story is that they were struggling for dominance—the younger against the older, really. Jacob means 'usurper.' Rebecca had a vision from God that said that Jacob would supplant Esau. And so, even before her twins were born, they were in a state of competition.

That's a recapitulation of the motif of the hostile brothers. It's a very, very, very common mythological motif. We already saw that, really well developed, in the story of Cain and Abel. Cain and Abel were, essentially, the first two human beings—the first two natural-born human beings. They are instantly locked in a state of enmity, which is symbolic of, first, the enmity that exists within people's psyche—between the part of them that you might say is aiming at the light, and the part of them that's aiming at the darkness. I think that's a reasonable way of portraying it. Obviously, it's a way that's sort of rife with symbolism.

My experience of people—especially when you get to know them seriously, or when they're dealing with serious issues—is that there is, quite clearly, a part of them that's striving to do well in the world, or even to do good, and another part that's deeply cynical and embittered, that says 'to hell with it,' is self-destructive, lashes out, and really aims at making things worse. So that seems to be a natural part of the human psyche. That's also reflected in the idea of the Fall. Those ideas are not easily cast away. They're associated with the rise of self-consciousness, in the story of the Garden of Eden. I think that's right, because I do think that our self-consciousness produces that division within us. More than any other creature, we're intensely aware of our finitude and suffering. That seems to turn us, to some degree, against Being itself.

I was watching a bunch of protestors in the U.S., last week, scream at the sky about Trump. It was interesting. I thought it was an extraordinarily narcissistic



display. But, despite that, there's something symbolically appropriate about it. A movie I really like—sadly enough—called [FUBAR](#)...I don't know how many of you have seen that. Hah. Yeah, you know that movie, I take it. It's about the people I grew up with. That's true, man. I'm telling you, that's true. The main actor in FUBAR, who's quite bright but completely uncivilized, gets testicular cancer. There's one great scene where he gets far too drunk, and he's stumbling around the street in a virtually comatose state. Of course, he's not very thrilled with what's happened to him. He's shaking his fist at the sky, and it's pouring rain, and he's cursing God. You can kind of understand his position. That kind of reminded me of these people who were yelling at the sky. They were dramatizing the idea of being enraged at—well, you can say 'God.' Of course, most of them wouldn't say that. But they were the ones yelling at the damn sky. I mean, you gotta look at what they're doing, rather than what they say. They were outraged that Being was constructed such that Trump could have arisen as President.

Well, this idea that we can be easily turned against Being and work for its destruction is a really common theme. It never goes away. You see it echoed in stories—like with the new Marvel series, for example, you see the enmity between Thor and Loki. That's a good example of the same thing—or between Batman and the Joker, or between Superman and Lex Luthor. There's these pairs of hero against villain that's a really dramatic and easily—everyone can understand that dynamic, right? It's a basic plot. The reason it's a basic plot is because it's true of the battle within our own individual spirits. It's true within families, because sibling rivalry can be unbelievably brutal. It's true between human beings who are strangers. It's true between groups of people. It's true at every level of analysis. And then, in some sense, it's archetypally true, at least with regards to deep religious symbolism, because you see that echoed in many stories, as well. I think the clearest representation is probably Christ and Satan. That's the closest to a pure archetype—although, in the old Egyptian stories, there's Osiris and Seth, or Horus and Seth. Seth is a precursor to Satan, etymologically. So it's a very, very common motif.

That's what happens, again, in Rebecca's womb. This idea is played out right away. The twins have a superordinate destiny, because one of them is destined to become the father of Israel. Of course, that's a pinnacle moment in the Old Testament, obviously—and, arguably, a pinnacle moment in human history. Now, the degree to which the stories in the Old Testament actually constitutes what we would consider empirical history is a matter of debate. But it doesn't

matter, in some sense, because—as I mentioned, I think, before, in this lecture series—there are forms of fiction that are meta-true, which means that they're not necessarily about a specific individual. Although, I do generally think they are based on the lives of specific individuals. It's the simplest theory, but who knows. But they're more real than reality itself, because they abstract out the most relevant elements of reality and present them to you. That's why you watch fiction.

You want your fiction boiled down, right? You want to boil it down to the essence. That's what makes good fiction. That essence is something that's truer than plain old truth, if it's handled well. Half a lifetime of events can go by in a Shakespeare play, and it covers a wide range of scenes, and so on. And so it's cut and edited and compressed all at once, but, because of that, it blasts you with the kind of emotional and ethical force that just the mere videotaping of someone's daily life wouldn't even come close to approximating. This motif of the hostile brothers is a deep, deep archetypal truth.

God says to Rachel, "two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger."

So there's an inversion, there, because, as we've discussed, historically speaking and traditionally speaking, it's the elder son to whom the disproportionate blessings flow. There's some truth in that, too, even more empirically. IQ tends to decrease as the number of children in the family increases. The oldest is the smartest, generally speaking. It isn't clear why that is, but it might be that they get more attention. Who knows. So those of you who are younger can be very unhappy about that fact.

Ok, so there's another plot line, too. Isaac and Rebecca are at odds about the children. There's an Oedipal twist to it, too. Isaac is allied with Esau, who turns out to be the hunter type. So he's your basic rough-and-tumble character. He's kind of a wild-looking guy; he's hairy; he likes to live outside; he likes to hunt; he's a man's man. That's one way of thinking about it. Whereas Jacob dwells in tents. He doesn't go outside much. Maybe he's more introverted, but he's certainly the sort of adolescent who hangs around home. There's some intimation—well, he's clearly his mother's favourite, with all the advantages—and, I suppose, the disadvantages—that go along with that. Isaac and Rebecca don't see eye to eye about who should have predominance among the sons. Rebecca is quite complicit with Jacob in inverting the social order.

The first thing that happens that's crooked is that Esau comes in from hunting, and maybe he's been out for a number of days, and he's ravenous. He's kind of an impulsive guy. He doesn't really seem to think about the long-term very much. Jacob was cooking some lentil stew, and Esau wants some of it. Jacob refuses, and says that he'll trade his stew for Esau's birthright. Esau agrees, which is a bad deal, right? It's a bad deal. You could say that Esau actually deserves what's coming to him, although, at minimum, you'd have to think of them both as equally culpable. It's a nasty trick. So that's Jacob's first trick.

The second trick comes later. Isaac is old, blind, and close to death. It's time for him to bestow a blessing on his sons, which is a very important event, apparently, among these ancient people. Esau, again, is out hunting. Rebecca puts a goatskin on Jacob's arms, so he's kind of hairy like Esau, and dresses him in Esau's clothes, so he smells like Esau. Isaac tells Esau to go out and hunt him up some venison, which is a favourite of his. Rebecca has Jacob cook up a couple of goat kids, and serve that to Isaac, and to play the role of Esau. And so he does that.

It's pretty damn nasty, really, all things considered, to play a trick like that, both on your brother and on your blind father, and in collusion with your mother. It's not the sort of thing that's really designed to promote a lot of familial harmony—especially because he already screwed over Esau in a big way. You'd think that would be sufficient.

So, anyways, he's successful. Esau loses his father's blessing. Jacob ends up, really, in the position of the firstborn. It's quite interesting because God tells Rebecca that Jacob is going to be the dominant twin. You'd think, again, with God's blessing—or at least the prophecy—that Jacob would end up being a good guy, but he's certainly not presented that way, to begin with, which is also quite interesting, given that he's the eventual founder of Israel. It's another indication of the realism of these old stories. It's always been quite amazing, to me, how unprettified these stories have remained. You'd think that, even if you're even the least bit cynical, especially if you had the kind of Marxist, 'religion is the opiate of the masses' viewpoint—which is a credible viewpoint, although it's wrong. I think it's a shallow interpretation. Part of the reason I think it's a shallow interpretation is because the stories would be a lot prettier, if that was the case. The characters wouldn't have this strange, realistic moral ambiguity about them. If you're going to feed people a fantasy, then you want it to be like a Harlequin novel, or a greeting card, or something like that. You don't want it to be a story that's full of betrayal and deceit and murder and mayhem and

be a story that's full of betrayal and deceit and murder and mayhem and genocide, and all of that. That just doesn't seem all that calming.

So, anyways, Jacob gets away with this, but Esau is not happy. Jacob is quite convinced that Esau might kill him. I think that was a reasonable fear, because Esau was a tough guy, and he was used to being outside, and he knew how to hunt, and he knew how to kill, and he actually wasn't very happy about getting seriously screwed over by his stay-at-home younger brother, twice. And so Jacob runs off, and goes to visit his uncle. On the way—and this is a very interesting part of the story—he stops to sleep, and he takes a stone for a pillow, and then he has this vision. It's called a dream, but the context makes it look like a vision of a ladder reaching up to heaven, with angels moving up and down the ladder, let's say. There's some representations of that. I showed you some of them the last time we met. But I'll read it to you, first.

"And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south..."

So that lays out the canonical directions, right? Now there's a center, with the canonical directions, like the little symbol that you see on maps. It's the same thing, symbolically placed upon the earth. A center has been established, with directional lines radiating from it. That establishes it as a place.

"...and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." That's pretty good news, for Jacob. It's not self-evident why God is rewarding him for running away after screwing over his brother. But that seems to be what happens.

Here's a couple of classic representations. The one on the right is William Blake. It's one I particularly like. Blake assimilates God with the sun, and with light. That's quite a common mythological idea, that God is associated with light, and with the day. "And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave

thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid"—which is exactly the right response—"and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. "And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it." That's a more important thing than you'd think, and we'll go into that a little more deeply.

Up until this point in the story, there isn't anything that's really emerged to mark a sacred space, right? There's no cathedral; there's no church. There's nothing like that. But here's this idea that emerges: you can mark the center of something, and that's important, and you mark it with a stone. A stone is a good way to mark things that are important, because a stone is permanent. We mark things with stones, now—we mark graves with stones, for example—because we want to make a memory. To carve a stone, and to carve something into stone, is to make a memory. To use stone is to make a memory, because stone is permanent. To set it upright is to indicate a center. That's what happens, and he pours oil on the top of it, which is a kind of offering.

"And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, then a tenth of what I earn I will give him."

That's interesting, too, because now there's a transformation of sacrifice. Until that point, sacrifices had been pretty concretized: it was the burning of something. Here, all of a sudden, it's the offering of productive labour per se, like a tithe. A tithe is a form of sacrifice, and so there's an abstraction of the idea of sacrifice. It's really important that the idea of sacrifice gets abstracted, right? Because it should be abstracted to the point where it's used the way that we use it today, which is that we make sacrifices to get ahead, and everyone understands what that means. But the sacrifices are, generally, some combination of psychological and practical.

We're not acting sacrifices out, precisely: we're not dramatizing or ritualizing them. We actually act them out in the covenant that we make with the future. Unless we're incredibly impulsive and aimless in our lives, and have no conception whatsoever of the future, and are likely to sacrifice the future for the present—which is what Esau does—then we make sacrifices. You gotta think

that the idea of making sacrifices, to make the future better, is an extraordinarily difficult lesson to learn. It took people God only knows how long to learn that. We have no idea. It's not something that animals do easily. Chimpanzees don't store leftover meat, and neither do wolves. A wolf can eat about 30 pounds of meat in one sitting. That's where the idea of 'wolfing it down' comes from. You're not saving it for later. They can't do that. They can't sacrifice the present for the future. This is a big deal, that this happens.

Now I want to tell you a little bit about the idea of the pillar. It's an unbelievably deep idea. It still orients us in ways that we don't understand. In fact, it's actually the mechanism by which we're oriented—and, if it's lacking, then we become disoriented. First, I'll show you some pictures, and I'll describe them. Ok, so there's a walled city. You can think of that as an archetypal human habitation. Maybe it's a reflection of something like a fire in the middle of the plain, forest, or jungle—although, it's kind of hard to get a fire going, there. Imagine a fire ringed around with logs and, perhaps, ringed around with dwellings, so the fire's in the center. The fire defines the center, and then, as you move away from the fire, you move out into the darkness. The fire is light, communion, and safety. As you move away from the fire, you move out, into the darkness, and into what's terrifying, out beyond the perimeters.

You can feel that if you go camping somewhere that's wild. You're pretty damn happy, especially if the wolves are howling, to be sitting by the fire, because you can see, there. The fire keeps the animals away, and, if you do wander into the bush and the darkness, you're on alert. Your predator detection systems are on alert. And so you could think about the classical human habitation as two places: one where your predator detection system isn't on alert, and another where your predator detection is on alert. You could think about that, roughly, as the distinction between explored territory and unexplored territory. Really, the founding of a place is precisely—a lot of this I got from reading [Mircea Eliade](#)—the definition of an explored center, set against the unexplored periphery.

You can kind of think about that with regards to the walled city: everything within the wall is cosmos, and everything outside the wall is chaos. But it also extends to the conceptual realm. Imagine that you're the master of a field of study. That's an interesting metaphor, because a 'field' is a geographical metaphor, right? In the center of the field are those things that everyone knows really well—the axioms that everyone abides by, in the field. And then, as you move towards the fringes, you get towards the unknown—towards the frontier of

the discipline. As you become expert, you move from the center to the frontier. When you're a competent scholar, you're on the border between the explored and the unexplored. You're trying to further that border. So, even if you're doing this abstractly, it's the same thing. It's a reflection of the fact that every human environment—concrete or abstract, it makes no difference—recapitulates the order-chaos dichotomy. That's why [Daoism](#), for example, is the union of chaos and order that constitutes Being itself, and that you stand on the border between chaos and order, because that's the proper place to be. Too orderly, too much in the explored, and you're not learning anything. Too much out there, where the predators lurk, then you're frozen with terror. Neither of those positions are desirable.

So you think—and this is a concrete reality, obviously, as well as a psychological reality—there were reasons for those walls. Inside the walls were all the people like us. That begs the question, what does it mean for people to be 'like us?' And then, outside the wall, there was all those people—because people are actually the worst forms of predators—who aren't like us. The wall is there to draw distinction between 'like us' and 'not like us.' That was a matter of life and death. You can tell that because—I mean, look at those walls. They had to build those by hand. And you do see walled cities that have three rings of walls. So these people were terrified, but not so terrified as the people who built three walls. They were really terrified, and they had their reasons.

There's an idea that's reflected in the Jacob's Ladder story: the center, where you put the pillar, is also the place where heaven and earth touch. That's a complicated idea. I'm trying to look at these stories from a psychological perspective. So then you could say that that's a symbolic place where the lowest and the highest come together. It's a place where earthly Being stretches up to the highest possible ethical abstraction, and that's the center. One of the things that defines 'us,' say, as opposed to 'them,' is that we're all united within a certain ethic. That's what makes us the same. This is a complicated line of reasoning. I'll go back to it after I show you some more pictures. But the first idea is that the center is the place where the lowest and the highest touch simultaneously. You could say that, in some sense, it specifies the aim of a group of people.

If you get together with people to make a group, you group yourself around a project, and that unites you. It unites you because you all have the same aim; you're all pointing to the same thing. That makes you the same, in some ways. If you're after the same thing that I am, then the same things are going to be

you're after the same thing that I am, then the same things are going to be important to you that are important to me. And the same things are going to be negative to you that are negative to me, because our emotions work out that way. That means I can instantly predict you; I know how you're going to behave. And so our aim is basically ethical, because we're aiming at something better, at least in principle. It's our ethical aim that unites our perceptions, and that's what aligns our emotions. That begs the question, if you're going to build a community, around what aim should the community congregate?

Ok, so the idea, here, is that the center of the community is the pillar that unites heaven and earth—it unites the lowest with the highest. There's some intimation of the idea that it's the highest that unites the community. Keep that in mind. That's a very old idea, as well. That's the idea of the [axis mundi](#), which is the center pole that unites heaven and earth. It's an unbelievably old idea—tens of thousands of years old. It might even stretch back to whatever our archaic, archetypal memories of our excessively old ancestry in trees—when the tree itself was, in fact, the center of the world, and it was ringed by snakes and chaos. We have no idea how old these ideas are, but they're very, very old.

Evolution is a conservative business. Once it builds a gadget, then it builds new things on top of that gadget. It's like a medieval town: the center of the town is really old, and newer areas of the town get built around it, but the center is still really old. That's what we're like. Our platform, our basic physiological structure, this skeleton body, is some tens of millions of years old—or older than that. If you think about vertebrates, it's much older than that. That's all conserved. So everything's built on top of everything else.

There's kind of a classic town. This is the same idea as the Scandinavian world tree. It unites heaven and earth, and around the roots of that tree are snakes that eat this tree, constantly. So that's the idea that there's stability, but there's constant transformation around that stability. And, at the same time as the snakes are gnawing on the roots, there are streams that are nourishing it. It's sort of an echo of the idea that life depends on death and renewal, constantly. Your cells are dying and being renewed, constantly. If they're just proliferating, then you have cancer. If they're just dying, then you die. You have to get the balance between death and life exactly right, so that you can actually live—which is also a very strange thing. That tree is something that reaches from the bottom layers of Being—maybe the microcosm—all the way to the macrocosm. That's the idea, anyways. There's Jacob and his pillar. He's got this idea that you can mark the center with this stone. It sort of symbolizes what he was laying on when he



dreamt. But now he's got this idea—you put something erect, and it marks the center. It symbolizes his vision of the highest Good—something like that—and the promise that's been made to him.

This image on the right is an Egyptian obelisk, with a pyramid on top of it. That's in Paris. It was taken from Luxor and put in Paris. That's a much more sophisticated instance of the same idea. There was a stone age culture across Eurasia that put up these huge obelisks, everywhere. [Stonehenge](#) is a very good example of that, although it's very sophisticated. They were also markers of places. We don't know exactly what their function is, but they're very much akin to this—some permanent marker of place.

There's a good one. That's in Saint Peter's. I really like this one because you can see the echoes of Jacob's vision for the establishment of a territory, there. You've got the obelisk in the middle, and then you've got the directions radiating from the center. Of course, this is [Saint Peter's Basilica](#), in Rome, which is an absolutely unbelievable place. It's just jaw-dropping. So there's the cathedral at the back of it, and then there's this circle of pillars that surrounds it. You can just see them a little bit, on the middle-left, there. That goes all the way around that entire enclosure. A very large number of people can gather there. So that pillar marks the center, and that would be the center of Catholicism, essentially. That's what that represents: the symbolic center of Catholicism. Although, you could make the case that the cathedral is the center. It doesn't really matter; they're very close together. It's half a dozen of one and six of the other.

Here's another representation of the same idea, right? This is why people don't like the flag to be burned. Conservative people see the flag as the sacred thing that binds people together. They're not happy when that sacred thing is destroyed, even if it's destroyed in the name of protest. Whereas the people who burn flags think, well, there's times to dramatize the idea that the center has been corrupt, and you can demonstrate that by putting it to the torch, as a representation that the corrupt center now has to be burned and transformed.

The thing is, they're both right. They're both right, all the time. The center is absolutely necessary, and is sacred, and is almost always also corrupt and in need of reparation. That's also an archetypal idea. That's a useful thing to know, because it's easy for young people, in particular, to think that, 'well, the world's gone to hell in a hand basket. It's the fault of the last generation. They've left us this terrible mess. We're feeling pretty betrayed about that and now we have to

and terrible mess. We're feeling pretty betrayed about that, and now we have to clean it up.'

Yeah, yeah—people have been thinking that for like 35,000 years. It's not new. The reason it's not new is because it's always true. What you're handed is a sacred center with flaws—always. That's partly because it's the creation of the dead, and the dead can't see, and they can't communicate. They're not in touch with the present. What they've bequeathed to you—apart from the fact that it might actually be corrupt, which is a slightly different thing—is at least blind and dead. So what the hell can you expect from something that's blind and dead? You're lucky it doesn't just stomp you out of existence.

That's a lovely photograph, obviously. That's the establishment of a new center. The center can be a cathedral, too, and often is. Of course, in classic towns, and in European towns, in particular—although, it's not only European towns that are like this—there's a center that's made out of stone, so that would be the cathedral, and it's got the highest tower. On top of the tower, there's often a cross, and that's the symbolic center. People are drawn together around whatever the cross represents. The cross obviously represents a center, because it's an X, right? X marks the spot. So the center of the cross is the center, and then the cathedral's often in a cross shape, which also marks the center. In a cathedral, there's often a dome, and that's the sky, and that's a ladder that reaches from earth to heaven. So it's a recapitulation of the same idea.

People are drawn to that center, and the center is the symbol of what unites them. What unites them is the faith that the cathedral is the embodiment of. You'd think, 'well, what does the faith mean?' Again, we're approaching this psychologically. What it means is that everyone who's a member of that group accepts the transcended ideal of the group. Now, the thing is, if you're the member of a group, you accept the transcendent ideal of the group. That's what it means to be a member of a group. So if you're in a work team, and you're all working on a project, what you've essentially done is decided that you're going to make the goal unquestionable. I mean, you might argue about the details, but if you're tasked with something—'here's a job for you ten people. Organize yourself around the job'—you can argue about how you're going to do the job, but you can't argue about the job, because then the group falls apart.

There's an active faith, in some sense. The reason that the active faith is necessary is because it's very, very difficult to specify, without error, what that central aim should be, given that there's any number of aims. It's a very, very

difficult thing to figure out. This is something we're going to do a little bit, tonight. What should the aim be around which a group would congregate? Especially if it's a large group, and it's a large group that has to stay together across very large swaths of time, and the group is incredibly diverse. What possible kind of ideal could unite a large group of diverse people across a very large stretch of time? That's a really, really, hard question. I think part of the way that question has been answered is symbolically, and in images, because it's so damn complicated that it's almost impossible to articulate.

But, obviously, you need to have a center around which everyone can unite. If you don't, then everyone's at odds with one another: if I don't know what you're up to, and you don't know what he's up to, we're just strangers, and we don't know that our ethics match, at all. The probability that we're going to be able to exist harmoniously decreases, rapidly, to zero. That's obviously just no good. That's a state of total chaos. So we can't have that. It's not possible to exist without a central idea. It's not possible.

It's deeper than that, partly because it's...I'll try to get this right. This is the sort of thing that I was arguing with Sam Harris about. Your category system is a product of your aims. That's the thing. If you have a set of facts at hand, the facts don't tell you how to categorize the facts, because there's too damn many facts. There's a trillion facts, and there's no way, without imposing some a priori order on them, of determining how it is that you should order them. So how do you order them? Well, that's easy: you decide what you're aiming at. Now, how do you do that? Well, I'm not answering that question, at the moment. I'm just saying that, in order to organize those facts, you need an aim. Then the aim instantly organizes the facts into those things relevant to the aim—tools, let's say—those things that get in the way, and a very large number of things that you don't have to pay attention to, at all.

If you're working on an engineering problem, you don't have to worry about practicing medicine in your neighbourhood. Focusing on any job, any set of skills, implies that you're good at a small set of things, and then not good at an incredibly large number of other skills. It simplifies things. So you can use your aim as a basis of a category structure. You also have to keep that in mind, because what it means is that your category system itself—which is what structures your perceptions—is actually dependent on the ethics of your aim. It's a moral thing. It's directly dependent on your aim. That's a stunning idea, if it happens to be true.

That's not how people think about thinking. We don't think that way. We think that we think deterministically, let's say, or that we think empirically, or that we think rationally. None of that appears to be the case. What we do is posit a valid aim, and then we organize the world around the aim. There's plenty of evidence for that in psychological studies of perception. Mostly they ignore, because the world's too complicated. They focus on a small set of phenomena, deemed relevant to whatever the aim is. Of course, the aim is problematic. Again, it's complex, because the aim I have has to be an aim that some of you share or at least don't object to. Otherwise, I'm not going to get anywhere with my damn aim. It has to actually be implementable in the world. It has to be sustainable across some amount of time. It can't kill me. It's really hedged in, this aim. It isn't any old thing. There's hardly any things that it can be.

Jacob's aim, for example, in undermining Esau, almost gets him killed. You can understand why—that's the other thing. That was a nasty bit of work; you can understand Esau's rage. Even though we're separated from the people in these stories by something like 4,000 years, you know immediately why everyone feels the way they do, at least once you understand the context of the story. None of that's mysterious, in the least.

So there's the church, and the church is underneath the cross. That's Saint Peter's Basilica. There's the cross on the globe, on top of the basilica, and then there's the cross on the obelisk, as well. And so what that means is that—and this is where things get insanely complicated—the center is defined by whatever the cross represents. Now, the cross represents a crossing point, geographically. It's certainly that. The cross probably represents the body, to some degree. But the cross also represents the place of suffering—and, more importantly, it represents the place of voluntary suffering transcended. I'm speaking psychologically, not theologically. That's what it represents.

Here's the idea behind putting down the obelisk with the cross and saying that's the center. That's the thing that everyone's aiming at, and so the idea would be, well, if you're going to be a member of the group, defined by this obelisk, then what you do is accept your position at the center of suffering, voluntarily, and therefore transcend it. That's the idea. That is one hell of an idea. It really is, man. That is a killer idea. It's actually a really clear signal of psychological health.

If you're a clinical psychologist and someone is paralyzed by fear, one of the things you do is break their fears down into relatively manageable bits and then

things you do is break their fears down into relatively manageable bits, and then you have them voluntarily confront their fears. It might also be things that they're disgusted by, say, if they have Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. But it produces very strong negative emotion, whatever it is. Then you have them voluntarily confront whatever it is that produces that overwhelming negative emotion. That makes them stronger. That's what happens. It doesn't make them less afraid. It makes them more courageous and stronger. That's not the same thing. It doesn't decrease the fear; it increases the courage. That's a mind boggling idea.

One of the things that's really interesting about these archetypal ideas is that—and maybe it's partly because of the hyperlinked nature of the Bible, but it's not the whole thing—no matter how deep you dig into them, you'll never get to the bottom. You hit a bottom, and you think, 'God, that's so unbelievably profound.' And then, if you excavate a little underneath that, you find something else that's even more profound. And then you think, 'wow, that's gotta be the bottom.' And then you dig under that, and there's no bottom. You can just keep digging down. As far as I can tell, you can keep digging down, layer after layer. We'll talk a little more about what the cross signifies, as the center.

People were trying to figure out what they need to unite under. What's the proper thing to unite under? I can give you another example. In the Mesopotamian societies, the emperor, who was more or less an absolute monarch, lived inside what was essentially a walled city. The God of the Mesopotamians was [Marduk](#), and Marduk was the figure who had eyes all the way around his head, and he spoke magic words. He was very attentive and very articulate. It was Marduk who went out and confronted the Goddess of chaos—the dragon of chaos—cut her into pieces, and made up the world.

You can kind of understand what that means. Marduk goes beyond the frontier, into the place of predatory chaos, and encounters the thing that's terrifying, and then makes something productive out of it. So it's a hero myth. Marduk is elected to the position of preeminent God by all the other Mesopotamian gods because he manages that. So the Marduk idea emerges up the holy dominance hierarchy, and hits the pinnacle. God only knows how long that took. It would be the amalgamation of many tribes, and then the distillation of all the tribal myths, to produce this emergent story of what constitutes top God. And then the job of the emperor was to act out Marduk. That's what gave him sovereignty.

The reason that he was the center around which people organized themselves—

when he was being a proper emperor—wasn't because there was something super special about him. The power didn't exactly reside in him, which is a really useful thing to separate. It's kind of nice to have a symbolic monarch. You get the symbolic power separated from the personality power. Otherwise, they get conflated. That's what happened in Rome, and you can see it tending to happen now and then in the U.S., like with the Kennedy dynasties, and that sort of thing.

The idea was that the emperor had sovereignty as long as he was acting out the idea of Marduk properly—going out into the chaos, cutting it into pieces, and making order. That was his job. They used to take him outside the city, on the New Year's festival, and strip him of all his emperor garments, and humiliate him, and then force him to confess all the ways that year that he hadn't been a good Marduk—a good ruler. That was supposed to clue him in, and wake him up. Then they would ritually reenact the battle of Marduk against [Tiamat](#), the chaos monster, using statues. If that all went well, then the emperor would go back in, and the city would be renewed for another year.

We still have echoes of that in our New Year's celebration. It's the same idea that's echoed down all those thousands of years. It's a staggeringly brilliant idea. Part of the idea is that the thing that's sovereign—so that's the pillar at the center, that everyone gathers around—is, at least in part, the thing that courageously goes out into the unknown and makes something useful out of it, for the community. That's very, very smart.

So this is another example of the center. This is the Union Jack. It's made up of a bunch of crosses. The first cross—the English cross—is the flag of [Saint George](#). That's the flag of England. What does Saint George do? He slays the dragon. Exactly. It's the same idea, right? So Saint George, patron saint of England, goes out, slays the dragon, and frees the virgin from the grip of the dragon. Same idea. So that's the center.

The second cross is called a saltire, but it's another crucifix. It's the cross on which [Saint Andrew](#) was crucified. It's the same idea—the center is the center of suffering, voluntarily undertaken—because Saint Andrew was a martyr.

[Saint Patrick](#) is the third cross. What did Saint Patrick do in Ireland? He chased out all the snakes. Right. So it's the same thing. So the flag of Great Britain is the combination of all these three crosses. That defines the center. That's what the flag is. So that symbolizes all of that. That's completely mind boggling.

There's more about Saint Patrick, too. He banishes the snakes after a 40-day fast. That's an allusion to the 40 years that Moses spends in the desert, and also the 40 days that Christ fasts in the New Testament. His walking stick, when he plants it, grows into a tree. So that echoes all of the ideas about the center that we just described. He also speaks with the ancient Irish ancestors, which, if you remember, is characteristic of the shamanic rituals.

In the typical shamanic ritual—it seems to be elicited by psychedelic use—the shaman dissolves down, past their bones. Then they go up into heaven, and they speak with their ancestors. Then they're introduced into the heavenly kingdom. Then the flesh is put back on their bones, and they come back and tell everybody what happened. That's a repeatable experience. The shamanic experience is unbelievably widespread. All over ancient Europe and Asia, and perhaps as far down as South America, it's highly conserved. It's out of that tradition, in all likelihood, that our religious ideation emerged. You can see echoes of that, here.

Back to the story of Jacob and his ladder. "So that I can come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee."

That's also an echo, I would say, of the obligation of those who climb the power hierarchy to attend to those who are at the bottom. If you think about the tithing as a form of wealth distribution, which is essentially what it is, part of the ethic that defines the proper moral endeavour, that's related to that center, is not to advance yourself at the expense of the entire community. So if you're fortunate enough to rise in authority and power and competence within the confines of a community, you still have an obligation to maintain and further the structure of the community within which you rose. That's obvious, right? If people didn't do that, after a couple of generations, the whole thing would fall apart. It's not reasonable to destroy the game that you're winning; it's reasonable to strengthen the game that you're winning. That also describes the ethic that should allow you to be an active member of the community that gathers around that center.

One of the things I've learned about the hero mythology, that I really, really like, is seen in the figure of Christ. Two things are conjoined in that story. There's two kinds of heroes: There's the hero that goes out into chaos, confronts the dragon of chaos, gathers the treasure as a consequence, and then shares it with the community. That's one. The other form of hero is the hero who stands in

the community. That's one. The other form of hero is the hero who stands up against the corrupt state, rattles the foundation of the state, has it collapse, and then reconstructs it. The two great dangers to human beings are unprotected exposure to the catastrophes of the natural world and subjugation to tyranny. Those are the two major dangers. So the ultimate hero is the person who reconstructs the structure of the state by using the information that he gathered by going out into the unknown. That unites them both.

Here's the rub, as far as I can tell. A structure, a center, has two risks associated with it: one is that it will degenerate into chaos, and the other is that it will rigidify into tyranny. It'll degenerate into chaos even if it just stays doing what it's doing. So if it just does exactly what it's doing, and it doesn't change, it will degenerate, because things change, and if it doesn't change to keep up, then it gets farther and farther away from the environment, and it will precipitously collapse. And then, if it just changes willy-nilly, so that nobody can establish a stable, centralizing aim, then it degenerates into chaos immediately, and no one can get along.

There's a rule for belonging to a community, and the rule has to be that you have to act in a manner that sustains the community and increases its competence. That's the fundamental moral obligation for belonging—and obviously so. Why would you walk into a clubhouse that was on fire? That's just not smart, right? If you decided that being part of the game was worthwhile, you've also decided—even if you didn't notice it—that you have to work to support that game. By deciding to play that game, you said that it's valuable. And if it's valuable, then obviously you should work to sustain and expand it, because that's the definition of having a relationship with something that's valuable.

That's the criteria for membership in the community. That's partly why, if you regard the cross, say, as the symbol of voluntary suffering—there's another element of that, too, that's worth thinking about. The reason that Cain gets so out of hand is because he's suffering, and he won't accept it—he certainly won't accept responsibility for it. He's angry and bitter about it, and no wonder. We have to be realistic about these sorts of things. All of you people are going to suffer at some point in your life, to the point where you're angry and bitter about it. There's just absolutely no doubt about that. You're even going to think, 'well, it's no bloody wonder that I'm angry and bitter about it—everyone would be—and things are so God-awful that there's no excuse for them to even exist.' That's a powerful argument, although I think it's ultimately self-defeating. That's kind of the moral of the story of Cain and Abel.



What that symbol means, instead, is that, even under those conditions of relatively intense suffering, you have to accept it voluntarily. Otherwise, it turns you against Being, and then you start to act in this terrible manner that makes everything worse. It seems, to me, that there's a contradiction, in there: if the reason that you're complaining is that things are bad, then it isn't reasonable for you to act in a manner that makes them worse. It's no wonder that people do that, but it's a degenerating game. Part of the idea of the cross—and the suffering that it represents—is that, if you could accept that voluntarily, regardless of its intensity, then you won't become embittered and resentful and vengeful, to the point that you pose a danger to the stability of the community—or to your own stability, for that matter. It might be your own stability, the stability of your family, the stability of the community, and the stability of the world. It might be all of that. And, increasingly, I think it is all of that.

Now we get the second part of Jacob's story. He goes to meet his uncle, Laban. He meets Rachel there—again, by a well. He falls in love, and goes to live with Laban. There are two daughters there: Leah and Rachel. Leah is not a particularly attractive person. It isn't exactly clear why, but the story makes it quite clear: she's definitely the least desirable of the two daughters. The story makes reference to her eyes, and it isn't clear if there's something wrong with her physiologically, or if there's something wrong with her attitude. It's not obvious, but it doesn't really matter. The point is that she's the older daughter, but she's the less desirable one.

Jacob stays a month, which is the limit of hospitality, in that time. If you stayed for a month, you were welcome, but you had to work for your keep after, I think, three days—something like that—which seems rather reasonable. So he stays a month, and then he has a chat with Laban. He's fallen in love with Rachel, by this time. He says, 'I'll stay with you and work for seven years, and then I'll wed Rachel.' Laban says, 'that's a fine deal.'

The seven years passes, and there's a wedding ceremony. It's quite a long thing, and the bride is veiled, and the bride goes into the tent, with Jacob. If I remember the story correctly—I haven't looked at it for a month or so—Rachel is outside the tent, speaking, but Leah is inside the tent. And so Jacob thinks he's getting married to Rachel, but he's actually getting married to Leah. It's an inversion, because he's in the dark like Isaac was, when he fooled Isaac. Now it's Jacob's turn to be in the dark, and he gets betrayed by his uncle and his bride-to-be, Rachel, and her sister, in a manner that's broadly parallel to the trick that he pulled on Esau.

that he pulled on Esau.

There's a karma notion, there, which I like. You might think of karma as a superstitious idea, and there are ways of interpreting it that might make it the case, but I don't think that's what it is. It's that no bad deed goes unpunished. It's something like that. Maybe you've done something bad to someone, and therefore there's part of you that feels quite guilty about that—hopefully. That part is looking for punishment, to set the stage right. You might think, 'well, no,' but it's 'yes,' unless you're a psychopath. That's how things work.

If you're interested in that kind of thing, you should read Dostoevsky's [Crime and Punishment](#), because it's the definitive study of that sort of phenomena. In that book, the main protagonist, Raskolnikov, gets away with murder. He does it successfully, and no one suspects him. He drives himself so crazy with guilt that he basically falls into the hands of the police—he drives himself into the hands of the police, because he can't tolerate what he did. It's an amazing book.

But, anyways, the point is that Jacob falls prey to the same sort of crookedness that he used to ratchet himself up the ladder. That happens far more often in life than people think. It's really not like he can complain about it, right? Not if he has any sense. He brings Leah out to see Laban, and he says, 'what's with this sister?' Laban basically says to him, 'in our culture, it's the custom to marry the eldest daughter first,' which is exactly right. He's rationalizing, obviously, because he's just screwed over Jacob in a major way, but it's a little late to take it back. The marriage has been consummated, and the ceremony has been complete, and all hell would break out if there was any attempt to sever the relationship. So that's how it is. Leah's married, and Jacob has the wrong wife.

This is Jacob, there, on the right. He's got the little flowery hat, and he's pointing to Leah, and he's saying, 'what's up, here?' Laban is a tough old goat, and he's not really all that sad about it. In fact, you can imagine that he's kind of laughing. Then Jacob has to work another seven years, and he gains Rachel. But, because God is a tricky character, there's another twist in this story: Rachel turns out not to be very good at having children, but Leah is really good at having kids. She provides Jacob with Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Reuben means 'see! A son!', Simeon means 'hearing'—like 'the Lord heard my prayer'—Levi means 'joined,' Judah means 'praise to YHWH,' and it's Judah from which tribe Christ arises. Judah is essentially promoted to status of firstborn, later in the story, because Reuben, Simeon, and Levi all do something reprehensible. So Judah gets promoted to firstborn. That's partly why, in the logic of this narrative,

that it's from the tribe of Judah that Christ arises.

While this is going on, Rachel is like suicidally desperate for children. She's jealous of her older sister, who's rather ill-favoured, as we pointed out, but seems to be damn good at producing sons. She's really not happy with Jacob, and so she chews him out. Jacob basically says, 'what do you want me to do about it? I'm not God,' which is a reasonable response, I would say. In her desperation, she gives Bilhah, her maidservant, to Jacob. We've seen that sort of thing happen, before.

Bilhah produces two children, Dan and Naphtali. The details are important because Jacob is the founder of Israel, and his sons are the founders of the 12 tribes. It's a pivotal moment in the story, because he's the fundamental patriarch of 'those who wrestle with God.' As we'll see, that's what the name 'Israel' means. He gets the name 'Israel.' You'll see why, in a while. You need to know these genealogies, in this situation, because they play an important role in everything that happens afterwards. Naphtali is the second, and his name means 'with great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, contended with her, and prevailed.' That gives you some indication of the tension in the household.

Leah is now past bearing children. She gives Jacob her maidservant, Zilpah—to keep up with her sister, I guess. Zilpah bears two children for Jacob, so he's piling up the kids left, right, and center, here. One of them is named Gad, meaning 'good fortune,' and the other is named Asher, meaning 'happy' or 'blessed.'

There's more rivalry going on between the sisters. This is quite an interesting little story. So Reuben, who's Leah's son, goes out looking for mandrakes. Now mandrakes have aphrodisiac properties, so that's a little odd, to begin with. But it doesn't matter; that's what happens. Rachel wants the mandrakes because she's still interested in having some children. She bargains with Leah to give her a night with Jacob in exchange for the mandrakes. More sons emerge as a consequence of that. Rachel finally gives birth, to Joseph. Joseph plays a key role in the last story in Genesis, which I hope to get to in the next lecture. Then we can close off Genesis. That's the plan, anyways.

Jacob isn't really very happy about the whole arrangement, because he's been there 14 years. He's got two wives. It's not too bad, but the bargain wasn't exactly clean. He doesn't really trust Laban, and there's no reason for him to do so. Laban was poor, before Jacob came. Jacob turns out to be a very useful

person to have around. He tells Laban he wants to leave and go back to his home country, and that he'll take the "speckled and spotted cattle, brown sheep, and spotted and speckled goats." They're in the minority, and that's the idea. Laban takes all those animals out of his flock.

There was an idea that the speckled goats and the brown sheep would breed true. If you have a male goat and a female goat, and they're both speckled, they'll have speckled kids. That's the theory, and the same with brown sheep. So what Laban does is take all the speckled animals out of the flocks, gives them to his son, and they go three days away with them. Jacob is left with the flock, but with none of these animals. The idea was that all the newborns were going to be his, and so what Laban has basically done is set it up so that, in principle, Jacob is going to get nothing for his work. That's another time when Jacob experiences betrayal. It's almost as if God isn't done with reminding him of the magnitude of what he did in the past. That's the moral of the story, in some sense.

There's a weird little twist in the story, here. What Jacob does is some sympathetic magic. When the animals are rutting, he puts speckled objects in front of them—speckled branches, and so forth—I guess to remind them about what they're supposed to be producing. Something like that. It works, and all these animals that Laban left are producing spotted animals like mad. I guess God's changed his mind, and let Jacob off the hook, slightly, here.

"Soon he was very wealthy (much cattle, maidservants, menservants, camel and asses.) Laban's sons become jealous and Laban is outraged." Well, obviously there's some competition, there, between Jacob and the sons, which is hardly surprising. Laban played this trick to strip Jacob of all his property, and, instead, Jacob got far more than he was going to get, to begin with. So you can imagine that's kind of annoying. Jacob thinks he better get out of there. Jacob calls Rachel and Leah: "And said unto them, I see your father's countenance, that it is not toward me as before; but the God of my father hath been with me. And ye know that with all my power I have served your father. And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but God suffered him not to hurt me. If he said thus, The speckled shall be thy wages; then all the cattle bare speckled: and if he said thus, The ringstraked shall be thy hire; then bare all the cattle ringstraked. Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me." "They decide to sneak away, but are unhappy with the lack of inheritance from Laban." As they sneak away, Rachel steals the idols that her father has in his house. It's not exactly obvious why. There's a lot of contention about why she's doing that. It could be "as punishment to bring with her the

about why she's doing that. It could be—as punishment, to bring with her the images of her ancestors"—maybe she's lonesome, moving away from home—"just out of spite; to show him that the idols were actually powerless; for protection; to stop her father from divining the route of their escape."

That last one is the strangest one, because the idea would be that Laban would've used some sort of ritual, with the idols, that would help him infer their escape route, and then he could chase. Anyways, that's the range of speculation about that. I think it sounds, to me, mostly like a little act of revenge—maybe with a bit of loneliness mixed in.

Laban pursues them, but God comes in a dream to tell him to leave Jacob unharmed. Laban catches up to Jacob and reproaches him, saying that he would have thrown a great party, if he would have known that they were going to leave—that he didn't want them to sneak away in the night. You can't tell from the story whether that's true or not. These people were pretty rough and impulsive, I would say. Maybe there was a fifty percent chance of a slaughter and a fifty percent chance of a party. Who knows. I've been to parties like that, actually.

Laban complains that his gods are gone, and Jacob says that whoever has them, he will have them killed. Rachel—who's really quite a sneaky character, all things considered—basically claims that she's having her period, and she's sitting on a carpet, with all the idols underneath. She can't move, so they search everywhere, and they can't find them. She's laughing away, behind her hand, about that sneaky little maneuver. But she doesn't die, so that's probably a good thing.

Laban checks everything out, checks the camp out, and he can't find anything. They reconcile, and so that's the first reconciliation that Jacob engages in. It's sort of like the karmic debt has been paid. That's one way of thinking about it. He got punished for his wrongdoing; he's learned his lesson, perhaps. That's good enough, as far as he's concerned. He got away good enough, and they make peace.

The next thing that happens, as they're travelling, is that "Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled a man"—man, angel, or God...It's not clear. We'll go with angel—"until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with the angel. And the angel said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And Jacob said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

And the angel said unto him, What is thy name? And Jacob said, Jacob. "And the angel said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob"—‘the supplanter’, ‘the overthrower,’ with that kind of implication of crookedness—"but Israel"—which means ‘he who wrestles or strives successfully with God—"for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."

That’s quite a story. I don’t know exactly what to make of it. There’s obviously a symbolic level of meaning. That is what human beings do, in some sense: they wrestle with the divine—even with the concept of the divine, for that matter. But the question is, do they prevail? It’s an odd thing that Jacob actually seems to win this battle. At least, he wins it enough so that whoever he’s wrestling—this divine figure that he’s wrestling—is willing to bestow a divine blessing on him. Maybe it’s a testament to his courage. Maybe it’s an indication that he has paid for his sins sufficiently, and he’s back on moral high ground. But I think the transformation of the name, from ‘Jacob’ to ‘Israel,’ is really telling, as well as the fact that ‘Israel’ means ‘he who wrestles or struggles with God," perhaps successfully.

It’s also so interesting that Jacob actually emerges victorious. You wouldn’t necessarily think that would be a possibility, especially given God’s rather hotheaded nature in the Old Testament. You don’t want to mess with him, too much. But Jacob does it successfully. Even more importantly is the idea that, whatever ‘Israel’ constitutes—which would be the land that Jacob founds—is actually composed of those who wrestle with God. I think that’s an amazing idea. It also seems, to me, to shed some light on, perhaps, what was meant by ‘belief,’ in those days.

I’ve often thought of marriage as a wrestling match. If you’re lucky, the person that you marry is someone that you contend with. I don’t think it’s tranquil, precisely. You might have noticed that, some of you. But the thing is, if you have something to contend against, then that strengthens you. That’s actually better than having nothing to contend against. And so Jacob is also the person who is strengthened by the necessity of this contending.

That contending or battling seems to be the proper relationship with God, rather than some sort of loose, weak statement of belief. I’m not trying to denigrate, to any great degree. It just doesn’t seem like the right mode of conceptualization. Human beings aren’t like that. We’re contentious creatures, and that actually seems to be something that meets with God’s favour, in this situation—especially given that that’s actually what he names the whole kingdom of the

chosen people. The idea is that the kingdom is composed of those who contend with God. That's a hell of an idea. That's for sure.

"And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?"—so that's not happening—"And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life preserved. And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh."

Jacob does walk away injured from this. He has a permanent limp, after that. That's also an indication of just how dangerous that contention actually is. He gets blessed, and he wins, but he doesn't get away scot-free.

So Jacob goes back to Esau, and he's terrified. Even though it's been 14 years, he thinks that maybe his hotheaded brother hasn't calmed down. He has good reason to think that, I would say. "Jacob sends messengers to Esau, who sets out with four hundred men." Jacob is not happy with this whole idea. "Jacob disperses his people into two bands"—so that maybe half of them cannot be killed—"Then he selects a numerous flock of diverse animals and sends out his servants to meet Esau," basically to say, 'look, I'm a jerk, and sorry about the whole birthright thing, and here's some animals. Maybe that's the beginnings of an apology.' It's something like that. But he's not very convinced that's going to work. But Esau, who has, perhaps, matured in the interim—that's one way of thinking about it—meets Jacob, and says "that seeing him is enough, but Jacob insists that he takes the gift, and Esau accepts," which is probably a wise thing, because, even if Esau is ninety-five percent convinced that just seeing his brother is enough, there's probably five percent of him that's really not all that happy.

You have to be careful when you say you forgive someone, because there might be a part of you that really doesn't, and that really needs something else before you can actually say, 'fine.' You don't want to fool yourself about that, because that five percent that hasn't been completely convinced will find its voice, at some point, and maybe undermine the whole reconciliation process. You don't want to think that you're any better than you are, or any nicer than you are. It's not helpful.

Jacob's smart to say, 'no, no. Thanks a lot, but take the damn goats.' Esau's smart enough to accept that, and he might do that, maybe, to please Jacob. But also I think so that there really is the possibility of establishing peace

also, I think, so that there really is the possibility of establishing peace.

Hypothetically, the gift that's being offered is of sufficient magnitude to erase the debt of the loss of the birthright. It's something like that. It's the payment of the real debt.

"And Esau said, What meanest thou by all this drove which I met? And Jacob said, These are to find grace in the sight of my Lord. And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself.

"And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me."

So he's taking the honourable judgement of his brother. It is honourable, because Esau did get betrayed. He does have a right to be standing in judgement. He equates that judgement with the highest of virtues. It's appropriate judgement. He wants to make complete amends to Esau, as if Esau is a representative of the divine element of justice. I guess that's convincing to Esau. It's quite a thing to say, that 'I need to be reconciled to you, because that would simultaneously reconcile me with God. This is between us, but there's a higher principle at stake, that is vital.' I think that is the case with betrayal. That's very frequently the case. If you betray someone, you have deeply violated what can only be called a sacred trust. It's the right terminology for that.

"Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough. And he urged him, and he took it."

The story starts with Jacob being an arrogant, crooked, deceitful character—maybe over-impressed with his own ability. He thought it was pretty amusing to pull a fast trick or two on his brother. Then he ran off, which is not all that brave, and then he got walloped a lot, and then, perhaps, he learned something. And then, when he came back, he was a different person.

That's a reasonable story. He has to repent completely about what he did, before he can rectify the situation properly. He's willing to do that. That's an interesting idea, too, because it's an early reflection of the idea that, if you do something wrong in the past, A, you can learn from it—so you're actually capable of learning—and B, that you can set the balance right in the present. Those are very optimistic ideas. You might say, 'well, once you've committed some sort of crime, that's it: there's no hope for you.' That's pretty rough, because the



crime, that's it, there's no hope for you. That's pretty tough, because the probability that you've done unethical things at some point in your life is a hundred percent. So if there was no way of setting the balance right, after that, then everybody would be doomed.

So then the story gets rough again. "Jacob settles in Shalem. Dinah, his daughter, goes looking around for friends. Shechem, the son of Hamor, lays with her, and then wants her for his wife." He actually has the order reversed, there. That actually turns out to be a problem. "Jacob hears of this. The fathers talk. They make an agreement." The agreement is that if all of Hamor's men—including Hamor and his son—are circumcised. So that's the proper offering, and I guess that brings them into the familial fold, and indicates that they're willing to make a sacrifice to do so—especially after Shechem put the cart before the horse, let's say.

The men of Hamor agree to do so, and that turns out to be a big mistake. While they're laying around the next day, suffering madly from the circumcision, Simeon and Levi sneak in, kill all of them, and take their wealth, women, and children. That's rough. It's rough. They're honour societies, right? There are still lots of honour societies in the world. They don't take kindly to what happened to their sister, although, they don't kill her.

"It came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out. The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and spoiled the city, because they had defiled their sister. They took their sheep, and their oxen, and their asses, and that which was in the city, and that which was in the field, and all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives took they captive, and spoiled even all that was in the house."

Jacob actually turns out not to be that happy about that, because he'd met with Hamor, and they'd hammered out a deal. That's where they were living, and he figured that he was making the best of a bad lot. His sons went behind his back. Jacob says to Simeon and Levi, "ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.

"And then said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot? And God said

"And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot? And God said unto Jacob"—and this is where we get back to the idea of the center—"Arise, go up to Bethel"—Bethel was where Jacob originally put that pillar. It's a real hero's journey: he has a set place; he goes out and has these adventures; he has a moral transformation; he reconciles, and he comes back to the same place, as a transformed person. That's a full hero's cycle.

"Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.

"And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem. And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob. So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel"—so that's the place where he put up the pillar, to begin with—"he and all the people that were with him. And he built there an altar, and called the place Elbethel: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother. "And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padanaram, and blessed him. And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob"—which means 'usurper'—"but Israel shall by thy name"—'he who wrestles with God'—"and he called his name Israel. And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins. "And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land. And God went up from him in the place where he talked with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, even a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon. And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel." Jacob has returned to the central place, which had been given to him as his territory. "Rachel dies in labor, giving birth to Benoni (son of my sorrow), whose name was then changed to Benjamin (son of the right hand)." Simeon and Levi have already done something unforgivable. Now it's Reuben's turn. He sleeps with Bilhah, who is Israel's concubine. So he's the third of the sons to make an unforgivable error. Jacob/Israel gets wind of it. Reuben would have been the

premier son, given that the two older sons were put out of the running, so to speak, because of their disobedience, and their impulsive, vengeful cruelty. Rueben can't keep his...Well, you get the idea. It seems to be something that's still quite surprisingly common.

Now we have the story that basically ends with the establishment of the 12 tribes of Israel. From Leah, there's Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulon. From Zilpah, there's Gad and Asher. From Bilhah, there's Dan and Naphtali. From Rachel, there's Joseph—who figures extraordinarily importantly in the next story that we're going to cover, which, hopefully, will wrap up Genesis—and Benjamin.

So now Israel itself is established. I'm actually going to end this early, tonight. That's quite the bloody miracle. The story then turns to Joseph. The story begins, essentially, "now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors."

It is often the case that clothing in dreams—footwear, in particular—symbolizes a role. This seems to be particularly true of women's dreams. That's been my clinical observation. That makes sense, right? Because you dress for the role. It's not that big of a mystery. So then you might say, 'well, what does a coat of many colors indicate?' It's something like the mastery of multiple domains, or maybe something like plura-potentiality.

Joseph is Israel's favourite because he sees in him this excess possibility. He basically tells his other sons that Joseph is going to be the head son, which they are not happy with, because he's just this young punk, fundamentally. Clearly, he's his father's favourite, and he gets this coat that's kind of indicative of this higher status. And so Israel inadvertently sets up a tremendous amount of sibling rivalry in the household, again. That's the understructure of the last story in Genesis. In the last of this lecture series, for 2017, we'll cover the story of Joseph and his coat of many colours, and what happens as a consequence of the favouritism shown to him by his father. I'm going to stop, there, because I'm finished.

## **XV: Joseph and the Coat of Many Colors**

That's a hell of a welcome for someone who's going to talk about the Bible. I thought I would get farther than through Genesis, by this point, but I'm not unhappy about the pace, either. I've learned a tremendous amount. So, hopefully, what we'll do today is finish Genesis completely. And then I think I'll try to start up with Exodus in May, depending on what happens next year. I have a busy travel schedule, but I would really like to do it. I really like the Exodus story, and I understand it very well. I had to do a tremendous amount of learning about a lot of the stories in Genesis, especially after the first few stories—say, up to the Tower of Babel—which is really good. But I do know the Exodus story, so I'm really looking forward to that. Let's dive right into it, and see how far we can get, today. We'll review, first. Joseph's father is Jacob. Jacob is the patriarch of Israel, essentially: the father of the 12 tribes. You might remember that he had a very morally ambivalent pathway through life. It's one of the things that I think is so interesting about the stories in the Old Testament: these so-called patriarchal figures are very realistic. I've also been struck by the accounts in the New Testament, that way. There's lots of things that Christ does that you'd think would have been edited out, over time, and sanitized, but they're not. The Old Testament is definitely not a book that's been sanitized.

It's quite interesting that that's the case. I've also been trying to derive some general conclusions about the moral of the Genesis stories. These stories are fundamentally moral; and 'moral,' as far as I'm concerned, has to do with action. Moral decisions are the decisions that you make when you're structuring action. When you decide to do one thing or another, generally, you want to do things that are the best things that you can think of to do—hence 'good.' But, sometimes, you also want to do things that are the worst things that you can do, because you're angry, resentful, or bitter.

The moral decisions that you make, that govern your actions, are, really, the most important decisions that you make in your life. It's not that easy to figure out how to make moral decisions. We don't have an unerring technology for that—the same way as we do for, say, making decisions about empirical reality, which, in some ways, seems a lot simpler. That's partly because we can work collectively at it, and partly because we have a rigorous methodology for deciding what's true and what's not true.

One of the things that's really struck me is an amazing theme that I would

One of the things that's really struck me is an overarching theme that, I would say, emerges out of Genesis—especially after the really ancient stories: the stories of Cain and Abel, Noah, and the Tower of Babel, when you get to the accounts of the historically real people. One injunction seems to be, 'get the hell out there, and do something.' One of the major themes, for all of the patriarchs that we've talked about—Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph—is, 'move out into the world, regardless of the circumstances at hand.' In the Old Testament stories, that's basically portrayed as hearkening to the voice of God. Something like that. Maybe you could think about that as destiny or a psychological calling.

The funny thing, too, is that it's not that these people have an easy time of it, when they heed that call. What's fascinating is that they often run into extreme difficulties right away. I think that's very interesting; first of all because life is, obviously, full of extreme difficulties; and second, it's another example of the failure to sugarcoat things. That's one of the things that, I think, makes a mockery of anti-religious theories that are, even, quite sophisticated, like Freud's. Freud thought of religion as a wish fulfillment, essentially. Marx thought about religion as the opiate of the masses. If those were true, it seems to me that there'd be a lot more 'wish,' and a lot less stark, harsh reality.

The first thing that Abraham encounters is a famine, and then he has to hide his wife, and then he basically journeys into a tyranny. So that's about as bad as it gets, in some ways. Those themes recur, continually, and no one ever lives where they're supposed to live: they live in Canaan, and not the promised land. It's a pretty rough series of stories. But the fundamental idea is something like, 'there's no time for sitting around; there's time to go out into the world and engage.' There's hints about the proper and improper ways of engaging. The improper way to engage is, I think, most clearly delineated in the Cain and Abel story, with Cain exemplifying the inappropriate way to engage with the world: that's to engage with the world in a bitter, jealous, and resentful manner.

That theme recurs, continually, with the duality of the brothers, right? There's constant conflict between a perspective that's, essentially, like Cain's, and the opposite perspective, which I'll get to in a minute. But Cain sees that the world is a very tragic place, and that the rewards are distributed unfairly, and that there are people who do better and people who do worse. As a consequence of that, he becomes bitter and resentful. He curses God, and then he becomes homicidal—fratricidal, which is even worse—and then he destroys his own ideal, and then his descendants basically become genocidal, or something like that.

That seems to be the wrong way to go about things, unless your goal is to make things worse. It's not like Cain has nothing to object to. He's got plenty to object to. His situation actually is bad. He's overshadowed terribly by his brother, who everyone loves, who does extraordinarily well, and who's good at everything. The story's a bit ambivalent about the reasons for Cain's failure—although, a fair bit of it is laid at his own feet. But he's definitely failing; so you can understand why he would have this terrible attitude. The problem is that all it does is make his situation worse.

One of the things I've also learned as a psychologist—sort of pondering these things—is that it's often a lot easier to identify what you shouldn't do, than what you should do. I think evil is easier to identify than Good. I think Good is trickier. But evil stands out, to some degree. For practical reasons—so that your life doesn't become hell, and your family life doesn't become hell—at least, you could get as far away from evil as possible, even if you weren't able to conjure up what would constitute the Good, as an aim. You could, at least, avoid those sorts of pitfalls.

I do also think that pitfalls like that really threaten our society right now. I see tremendous rise in resentment—fuelling almost all of the political polarization that's taking place. It seems unfortunate, given that, by and large, everyone on the planet is richer than they've ever been. Now, that doesn't mean that there's no disparity, but there's always disparity.

Anyways, Jacob and Rebecca deceive Esau. Jacob ends up with Isaac's blessing. That's a moral catastrophe. Then he has to run, because his brother wants to kill him. That's the fratricidal motif, again. I like that, too. I think that's really realistic.

One of the things that Freud noted, constantly—and this is where Freud really is a genius—is that the most intense hatreds—and, also, sometimes, the most intense love—is within families. In the Freudian world of psychopathology, it's all inside the family. In fact, the pathology in the Freudian world is the fact that it's all inside the family. The people who get tangled up in the familial Freudian nightmare—which is roughly Oedipal in structure—can only conceptualize the world in terms of their familial relationships. They've been so damaged by the enmeshment, trauma, deceit, betrayal, blurred lines, and all of that, that they just can't expand past the family, and go out in the world. The idea that brothers can be at each other's throats is, I think, a very powerful idea. It's not something that people like to think about

people like to think about.

Jacob has to leave, and it's not surprising. What he did was pretty reprehensible: he betrayed his brother. But, nonetheless, he's the person who dreams of the ladder that unites heaven and earth. That's a very perverse thing, you know? But one of the things I think it does is give, in some sense, hope to everyone. If only the good guys win, we're really in trouble, right? It's not that easy to be a good guy. It's really not that easy. Most people are pretty keenly aware of all the ways that they fall short, even of their own ideals. And so, if there was no hope except for the good guys, almost all of us would be lost.

That's one of the things I really like—and was more surprised about—with the Old Testament stories: these people have very complex lives. They make very major moral errors, by anyone's standards; and yet, the overall message is still hopeful. The message that runs contrary to the message of evil, say, is something like—well, there's a lot of emphasis on faith. That's a tough one. People who are cynical about religious structures like to think of faith as the willingness to demolish your intellect in service of superstition. There's something to be said for that perspective, but not a lot. The reality is much more sophisticated.

Part of the faith that is being insisted upon, in the Old Testament, is something like—and I'm speaking psychologically, here—'it's useful to posit the High Good, and to aim at it.' I really think that's practically useful, too. The research we've done with the [Future Authoring Program](#), for example, indicates pretty clearly that, if you get people to conceptualize a balanced ideal—'what do you want for your family? what do you want for your career? what do you want for your education? what do you want for your character development? how are you going to use your time outside of work? how are you going to structure your use of drugs and alcohol, and places where you might get impulsive? how can you avoid falling into a horrible pit?'—if you really think that through, and you come up with an integrated ideal, and you put it above you as something to reach for, then you're more committed to the world in a positive way, and you're less tormented by anxiety and uncertainty.

That makes sense, right? Here you are: alive, and everything. If you're not capable of manifesting some positive relationship with the fact of your Being, then how could that be anything other than hellish? It would just be anxiety-provoking and terrible, because you're vulnerable, and there'd be nothing useful or worthwhile to do. Well, I just can't see that as a winning strategy, for anyone.

You can make a rational case for adopting that strategy, in that you can say, ‘well, there’s no evidence for a transcendent morality, or for an ultimate meaning. There’s no hard empirical evidence.’ But it seems, to me, that there’s existential evidence, as well, that has to be taken into account. Of course, psychologists have talked about this, a lot: [Carl Rogers](#), Jung, and Freud, for example. Most of the great psychologists have pointed out that you can derive reasonable information, that’s solid, from your own experience—especially if you also talk to other people. You can kind of see, in your own life, when you’re on a productive path, that it sort of ennobles and enlightens you, or a destructive path. I think it’s kind of useful to think that, maybe, the dichotomy between those two paths might be real. That also allows you to give credence to your intuitions about that sort of thing.

Anyways, I don’t think it’s unreasonable to posit that, since you’re alive, adopting the highest possible regard for the fact that you’re alive, and that you’re surrounded by other creatures that are alive—I just can’t see how that can possibly be construed as a losing strategy. And so that’s something like faith. It’s not only faith in your Being, but it’s faith in Being as such. The faith would be something like—if you could orient your Being properly, then maybe that would orient you with Being as such. You never know. I mean, it might be true. There’s no reason to assume that it wouldn’t be true. Even if you take just a strict biological perspective on this, and think of us as a product of 3.5 billion years of evolution...I mean, we have struggled over all those billions of years to be alive, and to match ourselves with reality.

Life is definitely difficult. There’s no doubt about that. It’s unfair, and there’s inequality, and all of those things. People are subject to all sorts of terrible things. But I also wonder, if you weren’t actively striving to make things worse, just how much better could they be? People are like houses that are divided amongst themselves: they’re pointing in six different directions at the same time. They’re working at cross-purposes to themselves, because of bitterness, resentment, unprocessed memories, childhood hatreds, unexamined assumptions—all sorts of things.

The other thing, of course, that’s stressed very heavily in the Old Testament—and, of course, that goes through the entire Biblical corpus—is that it’s not only enough to establish a positive relationship with Being—which, I think, is a good description of faith...You have to make that decision, because Being is very ambivalent. You can make the case that, maybe, it’s something that should have never happened. But that doesn’t seem to be productive, to me. Faith seems to



never happened. But that doesn't seem to be productive, to me. Faith seems to be, 'I'm going to act as if Being is ultimately justifiable, and that, if I partake in it properly, I will improve it, rather than making it worse.' I think that's the statement of faith. What seems to go along with that is something like truth in conception and action. Even people like Jacob, who are pretty damn morally ambivalent, to begin with, get hammered, a lot, by what they go through. What seems to happen is that they're hammered into some sort of ethical shape. So by the midpoint of their life's journey, they're people who are solidly planted, who you can trust, and who don't betray Being, themselves, or their fellow man.

It seems reasonable, to me, to first assume that you have to establish a relationship with something that's transcendent. It might even be just the future version of you. Second, that you have to align yourself with reality in a truthful manner. That's your best bet. The Biblical stories are actually quite realistic about that, too, because they don't really say that, if you do that, you're going to be instantly transported to the promised land. Even Moses—as we'll find out in the Exodus stories—never makes it to the promised land. And so it's not like you're offered instantaneous final redemption, if you move out forthrightly into the world, establish a faithful relationship with Being, and attempt to conduct yourself with integrity. But it's your best bet. It might be good enough—and, even if it's not good enough, it's really preferable to the alternative, which seems to be something closely akin to personal and social hell.

Joseph's father is Jacob—later, 'Israel,' 'he who wrestles with God.' We've talked about that, a little bit. It's sort of implicit in what I've been saying—I think we all do that, to some degree. We wrestle with reality itself. That's for sure—and not only the reality we understand, but the reality we don't understand, which is sort of a transcendent reality—and then, maybe, whatever reality is outside of that. The classic Judeo-Christian conception of God is that there's time and space. Of course, there's lots of things about what exists in time and space that we're completely ignorant of—and is transcendent, in that sense. Then there's an idea that there's a realm outside of that. It's an interesting idea. It's a very sophisticated idea, I think, rather than a simple idea. It's difficult to know what to make of it. But it doesn't really matter.

I think that—regardless of what your attitude is towards those sorts of things—intellectually, you still end up in the same position as Jacob, practically speaking. I don't think that there's anyone who, at some point in their life—or, perhaps, even every day—doesn't, at some level, wrestle with God. You could just call it the nature of reality, I suppose, if you want to be, say, reductionistic

about it. But I don't think it makes any difference: it's still something you're stuck with. It's not only the nature of reality itself that you have to struggle with. It's also the nature of your moral and behavioural relationship to it: that's how you should perceive it, how you should conduct yourself, and then whether or not the advantages of doing it properly are worth the difficulty and the disadvantages. That seems, to me, just a straight existential statement.

Jacob gets damaged by his wrestling, which is also very realistic. He also ends up as father of Joseph, who's the favourite son—the son who's born in his old age, to his favourite wife. That's who we're going to talk about, today.

So Jacob is the forefather of the 12 tribes of Israel. There's his wives, and the offspring that resulted. Those are all the sons. There's a daughter named Dinah, as well. Rachel is the woman Jacob really loved. The first son he had with Rachel was Joseph, and that was when he was older. That's, in some sense, why Joseph's his favourite.

This is the beginning of the story of Joseph: "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours."

There's a lot packed into those two sentences. The first is that, "now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children." That's probably not so good. One of the things we've seen, in the stories that have preceded this, is that, whenever there's marked preference on the part of parents for one child over the other—with Jacob and Esau, Jacob was Rachel's favourite, and Esau was Isaac's favourite. That didn't work out so well. That put a real twist in the whole structure of the family. So there's a warning, there. You might say, 'well, you can't help having a preference of one child over another.' But I don't know if that's true, and it's certainly something you should be very cautious about. It doesn't seem to work out very well.

"Because he was the son of his old age." Fair enough. "And he made him a coat of many colours." That's a very interesting image, that coat of many colours—that idea. I'm going to delve into that idea, because it sets the stage. It says what kind of person he is: he's favoured, he's younger, and he also has this particular garment that characterizes him.

One of the things I've really learned from women's dreams, in particular, is that women very frequently—in my experience—dream of clothing as role. If your

interpreting women's dreams, if they put on the shoes of their grandmother, for example, then you understand very rapidly that the dream is trying to make an association between their own behaviour and something that's characteristic of either the state of being a grandmother or the particular grandmother. It makes sense, right? Clothing protects, but it also signifies a role. It's interesting. In the Old Testament stories, often, if someone's going to act deceitfully, they change their outfit. That's kind of what you do, when you act deceitfully, right? You dress up like someone else; you present yourself like someone else.

Anyways, back to the coat of many colours. For something to be many colours—it sort of spans the entire gamut of possibility. There's a hint that, if you want to be a full-fledged person, you have to manifest a very large number of traits. I want to go into that idea, a bit. The first thing I want to talk about is some of the things that we've learned about what happens to you when you go to a new environment. There's this very deep, fundamental idea in clinical psychology, which is that, if someone is anxious about something, and it's getting in their way, you take what they're anxious about and define it, because that already delimits it. One of the problems about being anxious about something is that you won't speak of it. It's like Voldemort. If you don't speak of it, it's way bigger than it should be. As soon as you start talking about it, you cut it down to size.

It's for a bunch of reasons: you're not as afraid of as many things as you think, and you're braver than you know, and more capable. So, as soon as you're brave enough to start talking about what you're afraid of, you see that there's more to you than you thought, and that there's less to the problem than you thought. And then you can decompose it further, into smaller problems. And then you can figure out how to approach those smaller problems. It doesn't seem to be that you get more frightened: it seems to be that you get more courageous, which is way better than being less frightened, because there's lots of things to be frightened about. If you're courageous, that really does the trick.

Let's say that you're very socially inept, and you don't know how to introduce yourself or establish the initial parts of a relationship with anyone. So then you start putting yourself in situations where you're required to do that. Then the question is, how is it, technically, that you transform? You can say, 'well, you learn.' Well, we want to be more specific about that. What does it mean that you 'learn?' Well, if you're dealing with someone who's particularly socially inept, and you're doing psychotherapy with them, you might teach them how to shake someone's hand properly, and say their name, and remember the other person's name. So you just practice that with them, so they have the motoric routine

name. So you just practice that with them, so they have the motoric routine down.

That form of knowledge is built right into your body. It's like, 'look at the person, put out your hand, shake it—not like a dead halibut, but with a reasonable grip—say your name—don't mumble it—look at them so that they can hear you, and when they say their name, try to remember it.' You can practice that with people, and then they develop something that's motoric: it's embedded right in their body. Another thing you can do, when you start a conversation, is not to sit there thinking about what you're going to say next, because then you won't be paying attention to the person, and you'll make a fool out of yourself. You'll manifest non sequiturs, right? It's like if you're dancing, and all you're paying attention to is where your feet are, then you're going to step on the other person all the time. So you want to pay attention to the other person. And then, whatever automatized social knowledge that you have will come to the forefront. It's a good thing to know, if you're socially anxious.

If you're socially anxious, one of the things you should do is pay way more attention to the person you are talking to, rather than less, and you should pay as little attention as possible to yourself. So if you feel yourself falling in because you're anxious, push your attention out, and pay attention to the person. To the degree that you're socialized, the automatic responses will kick in.

Anyways, you go into the social world, and you learn to shake someone's hand, and you learn how to listen to them, and ask them questions. That's the next thing, because you can't just ask them random questions, obviously. But if they start talking to you, and you don't understand something about what they're saying, or maybe something they said is interesting, and you ask them a question, they're pretty damn happy about that, because it means that you're actually paying attention to them. People love to be paid attention to, because it hardly ever happens. They really, really like it.

So what's happening? Well, first of all, you're mastering the automated motor movements, right? Where to point your eyes; where to put your hands; how to move your lips: embodied knowledge. It's a special kind of memory. You're practicing that, and that's building new skills for you. By listening to the person and watching yourself interact, you're also generating new abstract information that enables you to conceptualize the world in a different way. So if you go out and talk to 10 different people, or 50 different people, then you get to listen to what those 50 people said, and you get to watch how they express themselves.

You gather a corpus of knowledge that changes the way you perceive, and that broadens you as a social agent.

Ok, so that's two forms of knowledge. But then there's a third one, which is really interesting. You have a lot of biological potential. It's hard to know what potential is, but part of it is that you're capable of generating proteins that you haven't been generating—so you should get right on that, by the way. But the way that works, in part, is that, if you put yourself in a radically new situation, there are genetic switches that turn on—because of the demands of the new situation—that code for new proteins. So it's as if you have latent software—that would be one way of thinking about it—that will only be turned on if you go into the situation where that's necessary.

So then you might think, 'well, if that's the case, how much of you could be turned on, if you went to a whole bunch of different places?' That's a profound question. One of the deep answers to how you should get your life together is that you should go to a very large number of places, and turn yourself on. I want to walk through that, a little bit. There's a very rich symbolic world that expresses that.

One of the things that these old stories are trying to express and figure out is, 'how is it that you should act?' which is the same as, 'what constitutes the ideal?' Those are the same question. The hint, here, with Joseph, is that you should wear a coat of many colours, which means that you should be able to go have a drink in the pub with the guys who are drywalling your house, and you should be able to have a sophisticated conversation with someone who's more educated in an abstract way. Maybe you should be equally comfortable in both situations, right? One of the indications that there's more to you is that you can be put more places and function properly. That would be a good thing to aim at.

Here's the other issue. You know perfectly well that the fundamental tragedies of life, and your exposure to malevolence in the course of that life—so those being the worst things—cannot be altered, fundamentally. They're conditions of existence. You're going to be subject to your vulnerability, and you're going to be subject to malevolence. That's that, and you can't hide from it, because that actually makes it worse. So you're stuck with it. So then the question is, well, what are your options? One option is to curse the structure of Being for being malevolent and tragic—and fair enough. The other is to make yourself so damn differentiated, dynamic, and able that you're more than a match for that. Now, that's not an easy thing, but it doesn't matter, because what's the alternative?

There's no good alternative, and that's also worth knowing.

You see these ideas expressed in the strangest places. We've talked a little bit, in this series, about Pinocchio. But, if we haven't, it doesn't matter. There's Jiminy Cricket at the opening of the Pinocchio movie, pointing to a star. That's roughly the [nativity star](#), for all intents and purposes. It's a symbolic indicator of something diamond-like and pure, glimmering in the darkness, that's transcendent, above the horizon, upon which to fix your eyes. You need that, technically. Positive emotion is analgesic, by the way: it actually quells pain. So it's not just positive: it also gets rid of negative, which is a big plus.

Almost all the positive emotion that you're going to feel, you're going to feel in relationship to a goal. You feel positive emotion as you approach a goal. And so, if you want to feel positive emotion, then you need a goal. And then, if you want to maximize that positive emotion—which is enthusiasm, and what pulls you out into the world, as well as feeling good—then you need the best possible goal. That's going to engage the largest segments of your Being. If your goal's too narrow, then a bunch of you is not going to be on board for it. If the goal's well developed and multifaceted, then all of you can partake in that—even your negative elements; even your anger and fear can get on board with that. So you need a goal that justifies the tragedy and malevolence of life. That seems to be the bottom line. Now, maybe you think, 'well, there's no goal that can do that.'

There are still better and worse goals. I'm not convinced that there are no goals that can do that. I think that's an open question. You never know that until you pursue the proper goal long enough to figure out who you would be as a consequence of pursuing it. That's also your destiny—your existential voyage. It's also not something that anyone else can do for you. Someone can say, 'get your act together, for Christ's sake, and get at it. That'll make the world unfold best for you.' But there's no way you can know that, without doing it. And, unless you think you've done a particularly stellar job of that, then you have no reason to doubt its potential validity. Plus, crickets are telling you this. They're a very reliable source.

Ok, so you see the star. The star recurs as a motif, in Pinocchio. Pinocchio is a marionette, who's being played by forces that operate behind the scenes—which is a really good definition of 'persona,' from the Jungian perspective. It's also indicative of something like an ideological or conceptual possession. Geppetto, who's a good guy, is a positive father figure. Even though he's a competent patriarchal figure, he still lifts his eyes up to something that transcends his mode

patriarchal figure, he still lifts his eyes up to something that transcends his mode of Being—positive as it is—and wishes that his creation would undertake the kind of transformation that would make it autonomous and fully functional, as a moral agent. No strings, right? So that's very interesting, I think.

[Solzhenitsyn](#) said, "the salvation of mankind lies only in making everything the concern of all." That's a pretty decent star-like goal, I'd say. What happens in the Pinocchio story is, I think, a symbolic representative of what happens, at a genetic level, if you put yourself in new situations. Geppetto is roughly 'culture,' in the Pinocchio story. He's a craftsman, and he makes Pinocchio, who's his son. He's the socializing agent. He aims for something above mere socialization, which is, I think, part of the mysterious element of human beings.

In our scientific models, we basically have socialization and biology. But there's always a third element, in mythological stories, which is whatever you might construe as the spontaneous action of consciousness. That's associated with free will. That's just basically been conceptualized in religious terms as something akin to the soul. Now, we don't have a category for that, scientifically, because what we try to do, scientifically, is reduce everything to either socialization or biology. It's perfectly reasonable from the perspective of practicality, at a scientific level: you don't want to multiply explanatory principles beyond necessity. But there are many things that doesn't come to terms with, such as the fact that we all treat each other as autonomous Beings with free will, and that it seems to work, and that, if we stopped doing that, then things go to hell very, very rapidly. The mere fact that we haven't been able to conceptualize what that conscious free will might be, metaphysically or physically, doesn't mean it doesn't exist. It just means that we don't understand it. It was only in the last 15 years that we've discovered that ninety-five percent of the universe was made out of some kind of matter, the properties of which we can't even imagine—except that it seems to have mass.

Anyways, when Geppetto lifts his eyes up to the star, it's society aligning itself with the proper goal, with regards to individual development. Instead of society being at odds with the individual, they line up. And then what happens is that nature comes on board. That's the [Blue Fairy](#), in the Pinocchio story. That seems, to me, to be a representation of what happens biologically when you set the goal properly, get your culture behind you, and move out into the world. There's a biological transformation that occurs as a consequence of that, which means that a bunch of you that hasn't been turned on, turns on. I guess one

question would be, what would you be like if you turned on everything inside of you that could be turned on? Well, that's a good thing to find out.

Now, I've introduced a couple of other ideas. There's this idea in Jungian psychology called the [circumambulation](#). Jung had this idea that you had a potential future Self, which would be, in potential, everything that you could be. It manifests itself moment to moment in your present life by making you interested in things. The things that you're interested in are the things that would guide you along the path, and lead you to maximal development.

It sounds like a metaphysical idea—or a mystical idea, even. But it's not. It's really a profoundly biological idea. The idea is something like, 'well, you're set up so that you're automatically interested in those things that would fully expand you as a well-adapted creature.' There's nothing radical about that idea. What else could possibly be the case? Unless there's something fundamentally flawed about you, that is what the situation would be. It's kind of interesting to think about how that would be manifest moment to moment, but the idea is something like, 'well, your interest is captured by those things that lead you down the path of development.' Well, that better be the case.

Ok, so that's fine. There's some utility in pursuing those things that you're interested in—that's the call to adventure, let's say. The call to adventure takes you all sorts of places. The problem with the call to adventure is, what the hell do you know? You might be interested in things that are kind of warped and bent. Often it's the case that, when new parts of the people manifest themselves—and grip their interests, say—they do it very badly and shoddily. So you stumble around like an idiot, when you try to do something new. That's why the fool is the precursor to the saviour, from the symbolic perspective: you have to be a fool before you can be a master, and if you're not willing to be a fool, you can't be a master.

It's an error-ridden process, and that's also laid out in the Old Testament stories. The first thing that happens to all these patriarchal figures—when God kicks them out of their father's house, when they're like 84—is that they run into all sorts of trouble. Some of it's social, some of it's natural, and some of it's a consequence of their own moral inadequacy. So they're fools. But the thing that's so interesting is that, despite the fact that they're fools, they're still supposed to go on the adventure, and they're capable of learning enough—as a consequence of moving forward on the adventure—that they straighten themselves out across time. It's something like that.



themselves out across time. It's something like that.

The circumambulation that Jung talked about was this continual circling, in some sense, of who you could be. You might notice, for example, that there are themes in your life. When you go back across your experiences, you kind of have your typical experience, that sort of repeats itself. There might be variation on it, like a musical theme, but you're circling yourself, and getting closer to yourself, as you move across time. That's the circumambulation. Remember that for a second, because we'll go back to it.

Ok, so imagine that something glimmers before you. It's an interest that's dawning. First of all, you're paralyzed. You think, 'how do I know if I should pursue that? It's probably a stupid idea.' The proper response to that is, 'you're right: it probably is a stupid idea.' Almost all ideas are stupid. The probability that, as you move forward on your adventure, you're going to get it right the first time is zero. It's just not going to happen. And so then you might think, 'maybe I'll just wait around until I get the right idea,' which people do. They're like 40-year-old 13-year-olds, which is not a good idea. So they wait around until—it's like [Waiting for Godot](#)—they finally got it right. But the problem is that you're too stupid to know when you've got it right. Waiting around isn't going to help: even if the perfect opportunity manifested itself to you, in your incomplete form, the probability that you would recognize it as the perfect opportunity is zero. You might even think it's the worst possible idea that you've ever heard of, anywhere—highly likely.

Nietzsche called that a 'will to stupidity,' which I really liked. He thought of that as a stupidity that you have to take into account, fundamentally, and work with. So you can take these tentative steps on your pathway to destiny, and you can assume that you're going to do it badly. That's really useful, because you don't have to beat yourself up. It's pretty easy to do it badly. But the thing is, it's way better to do it badly than not to do it at all. That's the continual message that echoes through these historical stories in Genesis: these are flawed people, and they should have got out of their house way before they did. They go out, stumble around in tyranny, famine, self-betrayal, and violence—but it's a hell of a lot better than just rotting away at home. That's great.

So why is that? You start your path, and you think that you're heading towards your star. You go in that direction, and then, because you're here, the world looks a particular way. But then, when you move here, the world looks different—and you're different, as a consequence of having made that voyage. What that

means is that, now, that thing that glimmers in front of you is going to have shifted its location, because you weren't very good at specifying it, to begin with. Now that you're a little sharper, and a little more focused than you were, it's going to reveal itself with more accuracy, to you. So then you have to take—it's almost like a 180-degree reversal, but it isn't. You've gone this far, and that's a long ways to get that far. But that's a lot farther than you would be, if you just stayed where you were, waiting. It doesn't matter that you overshoot, continually. As you overshoot, even if you don't learn what you should have done, you're going to continually learn what you shouldn't keep doing. If you learn enough about what you shouldn't keep doing, then that's tantamount, at some point, to learning, at the same time, what you should be doing. So it's ok. Now what's cool about it is that, as you progress, the degree of overshooting starts to decline. We know that; there's nothing hypothetical about that. When you learn a new skill—even to play a song on the piano, for example—you overshoot madly. You make all sorts of mistakes, to begin with. Then the mistakes disappear. There's a great [TED talk](#) about this guy who set up a really advanced computation recording system in his home, and recorded every single utterance that his young child made while learning to speak. Then he put together the child's attempts to say certain phonemes, and put them in a list.

You can hear the child deviating madly, to begin with. And then, after hundreds and hundreds of repetitions, just zeroing right in on the exact phoneme. You might not know this, but when kids babble—they start babbling when they're quite young—they babble every human phoneme, including all sorts of phonemes that adults can't say. Then they die into their language. After they learn, say, English, then there's all sorts of phonemes that they can no longer hear or pronounce, but, to begin with, it's all there, which is really quite interesting. As they learn a particular language, they zero in on the proper way to pronounce that. Their errors minimize. Every time you learn something, that's how it is. That's really useful to know, too, because it means that it's ok to wander around stupidly before you fix your destination.

You see that echoed in Exodus, right? What happens is that the Hebrews escape a tyranny—which is kind of whatever you do, personally and psychologically, when you escape from your previous set of stupidly held, ignorant, and stubborn axioms. It's like, 'great! I've freed myself from that.' Well, then what? You think, 'well, now I'm on my way.' No you're not: now you're in the desert, where you wander around stupidly and worship the wrong things until you finally organize yourself morally, again, and head in the proper direction. So

that's worth knowing, too. You think, 'well, I got rid of a lot of excess baggage that I didn't need in my life, and now everything's ok.' It's like, 'no, it's not. You got rid of a whole set of scaffolds that were keeping you in place, even though they were pathological. Now you have nothing, and nothing actually turns out to be better than something pathological, but you're still stuck with the problem of nothing.' Well, that's exactly why Exodus is structured the way that it is. You escape from a tyranny—'hooray! We're no longer slaves!' Yeah, well, now you're nihilistic and lost. It's not necessarily an improvement.

It's also useful to know that because you can be deluded into the idea that—imagine that you're trying to become enlightened, which might mean to turn all those parts of you on that can be turned on. You think, 'well, that's just a linear pathway uphill. It's just from one success to another.' No, it's not. It's like, here you are, and you're not doing too badly, and the first step is a complete bloody catastrophe. It's worse. Then, maybe, you can pull yourself together, and you hit a new plateau. And then that crumbles and shakes, and bang—it's worse again. Part of the reason that people don't become enlightened is because it's punctuated by intermittent catastrophes. If you don't know that, then you're basically screwed: you go ahead on your movement forward, you collapse, and you go, 'well, that didn't work—I collapsed.' No—that's par for the course. It's not an indication that you've failed; it's just an indication that it's really hard, and that, when you learn something, you also unlearn something. The thing you unlearned is probably useful, and unlearning it is actually painful.

Let's say you have to get out of a bad relationship. It isn't any relationship that's one-hundred percent bad, so, when you jump out of it, well, maybe you're in better shape, but you're still lonesome and disoriented, and you don't know what your past was, and you don't know what your present is, and you don't know what your future is. That's why people stay with the devil they know, instead of looking for the devil they don't know.

The fact that you're full of faults doesn't mean you have to stop. Thank God for that. That's a really useful thing. The fact that you're full of faults doesn't mean that you can't learn. You can posit an ideal, and you're gonna be wrong about it, but it doesn't matter, because what you're right about is positing the ideal and moving towards it. If the actual ideal isn't conceptualized perfectly, well, first, 'surprise, surprise,' because what are you going to do that's perfect? So it doesn't matter that it's imperfect. It just matters that you do it, and you move forward. That's really positive news, as far as I'm concerned, because you can actually do that. You can do it badly—anyone can do that. So that's useful.

If you were an efficient person, you would have just done that, but you're not—but who cares, you know? You still end up in the same place. Maybe the trip is even more interesting—probably too interesting. Jung: "I began to understand that the goal of psychic development"—by which he means psychological or spiritual development—"is the self. There is no linear evolution; there is only a circumambulation of the self."

It's like you're spiralling into something. The thing that you're spiralling into recedes as you move towards it, and it gets more and more sophisticated and well developed, as you move towards. You're not going to run out of goals, right? No matter how much you have your act together, there's probably—undoubtedly—30 dimensions along which you could get your act together a lot more. Some of those aren't even conceivable to you, when you're in your initial, uncarved state, let's say.

"Uniform development exists, at most, at the beginning; later, everything points toward the centre. This insight gave me stability, and gradually my inner peace returned."

So this is fun. On the left, there, that's the [Chartres Cathedral](#). That's the one that has the maze in it, that I told you about. They actually light that up with lasers, now. They're turning it into a cathedral of light, which I think is really fascinating. It's a continuation of the same idea, right? The stained glass windows were, obviously—I wouldn't call them primitive attempts to do that. I mean, stained glass windows are pretty impressive. But it's an elaboration of the same thing. So now you can go to that cathedral—they light up the whole town like that, which is really something.

There's how the cathedral was built. It's a cross—and remember that the cross is an X that marks the center of the world, and the cross is the place where each individual is. I think that's the fundamental message of Christianity: the cross marks the place where every single individual is. It's a tragic place that consists of suffering and exposure to malevolence. The only way to come to terms with it is to accept it. I don't see anything metaphysical about that statement, whatsoever.

X marks the spot. Fair enough. You're in a spot; you're right in the center of your world; it's right in the center of the world, as far as you're concerned—and the same with the rest of us. It's characterized by suffering and exposure to

malevolence. There's no doubt about that. What are you going to do about that? Bitter, resentful, hateful? All that does is make it worse, so you have to accept it. Now, that's not actually an easy thing. I would say that's a heroic task, to voluntarily accept the conditions of your own existence. That happens at the cross. So that's fine. That's associated with light. Well, that's good, that it's associated with light. You wouldn't want that associated with darkness. That would be a bad thing.

There's the labyrinth. That was built in 1,200 A.D. It's the same idea as that star sequence of slides that I just showed you. Here's the idea: north, south, west, and east. That's the whole world, laid out in two dimensions. So the question is, how do you get to the center? Now, we already know what the center is: the center is the center of the cross. That's the place of maximal suffering—you could say maximal malevolence, as well—but it's also the place where that's transcended. So how do you get there? Well, the answer is that you don't just stand on the outside, looking in. That's not going to help. And you can't just run right to the center—even if you're in California. And so you have to walk in, here, and then you go to every single place—every single place—on that little cosmos. And then, once you've gone to every single place, and expanded yourself as a consequence of going north, and west, and east, and south, then there's enough of you so that you can figure out where the center is, but also so that you can tolerate being at the center. So that's what that represents.

Let's make no mistake about it, eh? People were pretty damn serious about those ideas. That's quite the piece of work, for people in the 12th century, you know? Some of those damn cathedrals took 300 years to build. We don't build anything that takes 300 years. People were putting a lot of effort into whatever these things meant. If you think they meant 'bearded man in the sky,' then, you know...It's hard to account for the kind of motivation that would produce these buildings, with that kind of paucity of conceptualization.

The towns—and it was certainly the case in Chartres—groaned under the tax burden that was required to produce these. Now, you might think, 'well, that's partly tyrannical,' and no doubt that's the case. But that's not the whole story. The whole story is that the people who produced those buildings thought about every bit of it. Nothing's accidental, and they're trying to portray something—just like that window is trying to portray something. It's the center from which all things manifest themselves. That's Christ, there, being portrayed as that center, or the center within him. Something like that—very much like the

[chakras](#) in yogic practice. It's the same basic idea: it's the opening up of the internal structure, and its proper realization.

There are people walking the labyrinth. So that's the coat of many colours, right? That's this differentiated mode of being that enables you to be competent and at home in the widest possible number of places. That's a real differentiation of your personality. It's a breaking through the boundaries of your personality, including the ones that you impose on yourself, to become someone who's useful wherever they're put. That's really relevant to this story of Joseph, too.

One of the things that happens to Joseph—well, a lot of bad things happen to him. Because he's the favourite of his father, his brothers hate him. First, they're going to throw him in a pit—I think they do throw him in a pit. Then they sell him to be a slave, and then he ends up—well, we'll go through the story. He ends up some places where you probably wouldn't want to go—prison being one of them. But it doesn't matter, because, even when they put him in prison, he's actually not in prison. He just figures out how to make the prison work way better, and then he's in control of the prison.

I had this friend. He was very smart, but very cynical. He wasn't employed very well, and he got a little older than he should have, given his level of intelligence and employability. He had to take jobs that weren't very intellectually challenging. One of the things I tried to convince him of was that, even if he worked—he wanted to work behind the parts department in an automotive store, because he like cars. But it was beneath him, you know? As far as he was concerned, he was too smart for a job like that—which, actually, turned out not to be true. He wasn't smart enough for a job like that, or he wasn't wise enough.

One of the things I tried to tell him was that he was looking at the situation wrong. Even in a so-called simple job—like, say, dishwashing in a restaurant, which I did an awful lot of—it's not that simple. You're dealing with a lot of other people, very fast staff changeover, and you're feeding people; you're helping them have a celebration; you're helping them take a break. You can do it really well, and then the kitchen can operate properly, and then people can come out to the restaurant, and it's not a bloody catastrophe. Even when you're doing something that's a menial job, so to speak, like dishwashing, there are ways of doing it really badly, resentfully, and horribly, and doing it really well. As soon as you do it really well, it's not a menial job, anymore. It immediately transforms. Now, you can be around people who won't let that happen—and you should go get another job if that's the case. But if you do it properly then it's

should go get another job, if that's the case. But, if you do it properly, then it's not menial, at all. That's also a good way out of resentment. You think, 'well, I've just got this two-bit job.' It's like, 'yeah—what if you did it as well as you possibly could? What would happen?' Well, the first thing that would happen is you would get a lot smarter. That's for sure, and that's hardly a negative thing.

So that's the coat of many colours. It's an intimation of what Joseph is like. What we're seeing, with all of these patriarchal figures, is the continual realization of the ideal person. You could think about it as success of approximations of the ideal person. The story is exploring all sorts of different possibilities, including ones that are very violent, catastrophic, and malevolent. It's trying to cover the entire territory, and to focus in on the proper way through the maze of life—the labyrinth. The hint, here, is that you should be multidimensional.

"These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report."

Well, we already know that Joseph is Jacob's favourite, so that doesn't make him very popular among his brothers. He's younger, and now we also find out that he's been set up, more or less, as a snitch, because that's what this phrase means: he goes and watches his older brothers, and, if they do something they shouldn't do, he comes trotting back to Jacob, and reports. Well, that's not going to make you popular. And you would say, 'well, is that Joseph's problem or Jacob's problem?' I would say—and this is something I learned from reading Jung, too—that that's a conspiratorial problem. The parents are at fault, but so is the child who agrees to do that. They've got a little cabal, going. You might say, 'well, it's only the parents' fault,' but the son will be taking advantage of every advantage that offers him. He could say, 'no, I won't do that.' So, anyways, Joseph is the favourite. He's a bit of a teacher's pet. That's what it looks like.

"Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him."

So let's say you have a child, or a number of children, and one of them is your favourite. How should you treat that child? Well, it isn't obvious that you do them any favours by overtly making them your favourite. First of all, maybe you

men any favours by overly making them your favourite. First of all, maybe you don't challenge them as much as you should. Second of all, you definitely set up a Cain and Abel-like scenario, in the household—or maybe it's an Oedipal situation, too, because you happen to love your child more than you love your spouse. That's not a recipe for familial harmony. It seems to be a bad idea.

Ok, so now we have two reasons that Joseph is not liked by his brothers. One is, well, he's a bit of a rat fink, and the other is that he's the favourite—and he's playing that to the hilt, by the looks of things.

"And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him. And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more.

"And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: for, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf." Remember: he's the young one, right? He's also the son of the favourite wife, which is another thing not really working in his favour. "And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? Or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words." Well, there's a shock—that makes perfect sense. It gets worse. There's the wheat sheafs, bowing, there. What's going on, here? Well, that's not the end of—let's call it his 'grandiosity.'

There's an idea, too, in the Old Testament—especially in the stories of Joseph—that, if God sends you a dream twice, he really means it. I don't know if that's true, although, I do know that people have repeating dreams. It might be true that a dream you have twice is really trying to punch something home. It's certainly the case that recurrent nightmares are meaningful, and recurrent nightmares are associated quite tightly with decreased states of mental health. If you can treat the nightmare—which is often quite easy, by the way—then some of the mental health problems will decrease. So repeated dreams seem to be important.

"And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? And his brethren envied him; but his father



observed the saying."

Well, what the hell do you make of something like that, if someone tells you that? Are they responsible for their dreams? We don't really hold ourselves responsible for the dreams we have at night. Then what do you make of a dream? One of the things that Jung pointed out—this is where he differed from Freud, substantially. Freud tended to think that the dream hid its meaning, because its contents weren't acceptable to the conscious mind. Jung said, 'no, no. You don't understand. That's not what happens. The dream is doing the best it can to express something that the person doesn't yet really know.' Jung thought about the dream as a manifestation of nature. It wasn't associated with the ego, at all. It was like, you have a dream, and there are things happening in it—the same way that things are happening when you walk into a dinner party. The dream isn't something that's subject to your capacity for manipulation. It's something that happens to you; it's not something that you do.

So, if someone has a dream like that, well, you've got three options. You can discount the dream altogether, which is what people in the modern world tend to do. That's a very bad idea, because they're thoughts, and you shouldn't discount them. They're hardly random—as some neuroscientists claim. That's an absolutely cock-eyed theory. It would be like snow on a TV set, if it was random. So one is that you just discount dreams. The other is that you consider the person a liar and a braggart and a narcissist. Well, what's the third? He dreamt that the sun and the moon and the stars bowed down to him. You might think about that, two or three times. But it's not necessarily something that's going to make you happy.

"And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here am I. And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him." Rough people, back then. This sort of thing is happening quite frequently. "And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams."

So there's an echo of the Cain and Abel story, obviously. It's not quite as clear, because in the Cain and Abel story, Abel is clearly just doing well. Here, you can't quite get a handle on Joseph's character. You can't tell if he's actually the elect, or if he's just a spoiled brat, with delusions of grandeur. But it doesn't

matter, because his brothers are so irritated at the fact that he's favoured—and, perhaps, even the fact that he might be someone destined for something special—that they find it perfectly reasonable to destroy that.

It's so interesting how often that motif of pulling down an ideal manifests itself in these old stories. The pattern established in the Cain and Abel story just repeats, repeats, and repeats. I think that's dead true; I think it just repeats all the time. People are annoyed about how tragic their lives are; they're annoyed that they're subject to malevolence; and they're annoyed that they're not doing as well as other people are doing. That puts them exactly into this state of mind.

Now, if you're going to kill someone because you're resentful, as a modern person, you don't generally slay them, and throw them into a pit. What you do is kill them slowly, over a few decades. It isn't obvious, to me, that that's any better. I've seen plenty of married couples who were in that situation. [Mitch Hedberg](#) used to complain about turtlenecks: it was like being strangled by a really weak midget. It's probably a really politically incorrect joke, but it's a funny joke. And then you see relationships that are like that. It's like each person has their hands around the neck of the other person, but they don't have enough courage to actually squeeze. They just put enough pressure on to cut the circulation off a tiny bit, so the person just dies over a 30-year period. You all laugh because you know it's true.

"And we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him"—which would be true, actually: it would be the evil beast that's inside brothers—"and we shall see what will become of his dreams."

That's interesting, too. They want to spite themselves, because, maybe, Joseph is something special. And then they want to spite their father—which is probably not the wisest idea, because they owe him some gratitude. I mean, maybe he's acting like a pain in the neck—there's some evidence for that—but this is a little bit harsh. But they also want to spite God—just like Cain did. That's what it means: "we shall see what will become of his dreams." As soon as you're, in some sense, trying to fight against the natural intuition of someone, you set yourself up against the structure of Being itself. Pretty bad.

"And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him. And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness"—Reuben's the good guy, in this story—"and lay no hand upon him: that he might rid him out of their hands to deliver him to his

hand upon him, that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again." So Reuben was actually trying to save him: "that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again. And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him; and they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it. "And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt. And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?" So he's the practical guy, here. "Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content. Then there passes by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver"—that's an amount that echoes through, into the future—"and they brought Joseph to Egypt." I'm never really sure how these slavery stories work. So it's 2,500-3,000 years ago, and I decide I'm going to sell you to the Ishmeelites. I get the money, you get to be a slave, and they take you away. I don't really understand how that works. I can't figure out why people weren't selling each other all the time. But, if you're family, maybe you can do it. "And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes." So Reuben's very upset about this. "And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go? And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood."

That's interesting, too, because blood is actually another colour. He's got this coat of many colours, and blood is definitely a colour. So this is the addition, in some sense, of the colour of blood to Joseph's coat. I would say it's probably a necessary colour. I don't think you're serious enough until your coat has been dipped in blood. That can happen in many ways.

"And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father." So they lied to him. It's very, very nasty business, this. They sell his son to slavery; they claim that he's dead; and they lie to him. They put him into an extreme state of grief. There's a lot of hatred underneath that—a tremendous amount of hatred for Joseph, and also for Jacob.

"This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no. And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; and evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon

his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him. "And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard. And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither."

So now Joseph is a slave. You think, 'well, this is a man who has a lot of reason to be irritated at the structure of reality.' He's gone from being the favourite, to being betrayed by all of his brothers—that's pretty rough—and then he's been transformed into a slave, and now he's being sold, to work as a slave. You'd think that would corrupt his character.

I think people are always looking for an excuse to have their character corrupted. If your character is corrupted, then you get to lie, and you get to cheat, and you get to steal, and you get to betray, and you get to act resentfully, and you get to do nothing. That's all easy. It's easier to lie than to tell the truth. It's easier to do nothing than to do something. There's always part of you thinking, 'well, I need a justification for being useless and horrible, because that'd be a lot less work.' Then, if something terrible comes along, you think, 'aha! That's just exactly the excuse that I was waiting for.' And then out all that comes.

Solzhenitsyn, when he was in the concentration camps in Russia, watching how people behaved, said that there were people, who were put in the camps, who immediately became trustees or guards. They were even more vicious than the people who had been hired as guards. His idea was that they had collected all of what he called 'foulness,' if I remember correctly, around them in normal life, but they didn't have the opportunity to express it. As soon as you gave them the opportunity—there it was, right away.

So one of the messages that seems to echo through these Old Testament stories is that, just because something terrible happens to you, that doesn't mean that you get to wander off the path and make things worse. Maybe it doesn't matter how terrible it is. That's a tough call, because you see people, now and then in life, and they've really got it rough. Fifty bad things are happening to them at the same time. You think, 'if you were bitter and resentful and hostile—yeah, no wonder.' But then you meet people—Solzhenitsyn, again, talked about this in *The Gulag Archipelago*. He said he met enough people to impress him in the concentration camp system, who didn't allow their misfortunes to corrupt them.

That's something, man, because maybe the only real misfortune is to become corrupted. That's a really useful thing to think. Maybe the rest of it is trivial, in comparison. I know that's a rough thing, because you can be in very harsh circumstances, but I do think there's something to that.

"And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand."

So that's an echo of the idea that we encountered earlier, of walking with God. So Adam walked with God before he ate the fruit with Eve, and then he wouldn't walk with God. And then Noah walked with God, and Abraham walked with God. The idea is that, well, that's the alignment with the highest ideal. I think it's something like that. We can think about that as a metaphysical claim, as well. But I don't think it is.

I've got thousands of letters, in the past year, from people who have told me that they were in a pit—that's exactly right—and that they decided that they were going to try to put their lives together, and that it worked. So that's really something. They write surprised: 'well, I decided I was going to work hard at what I was doing, and I wasn't going to lie any more than absolutely necessary. I thought I would give it a try, for a few months. All sorts of good things started to happen to me.' It's like, maybe that's how the world works. Now, obviously, it doesn't work like that all the time, because you can get sliced off at the knees. There's an arbitrary element to existence that you can't wish away. But that doesn't mean that there aren't bad strategies and good strategies.

I do think that one of the most fundamental existential questions is, if things aren't going well for you in your life, are you absolutely certain that you are doing absolutely everything you can to put things in order? If you're not, then you shouldn't complain, because you don't know to what degree you're contributing—or even causing—the circumstance. Now, that's a very annoying thing to think, and I'm not trying to blame the victim. I know that people end up with lung cancer because they were exposed to asbestos—although, I also know, too, that if you have lung cancer because you've been exposed to asbestos, it can be a tragedy or it can be hell, to some degree. That depends on how you conduct yourself. I know that's a pretty gloomy possibility.

Anyways, Joseph is a slave, but it turns out that he hasn't sacrificed the integrity of his character. So it turns out that he's not a slave; it's just that everyone

of his character. So it turns out that he's not a slave. It's just that everyone around him thinks that he's a slave, but he's not. So that's pretty interesting.

"He's a goodly person, and well favoured." Well, so he's a good guy, and an impressive specimen, as well. This is pretty interesting, given the current political climate, I would say.

"And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand. There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? "And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her." He's being sexually harassed, Joseph. "And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within. And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out." That's kind of embarrassing for poor Joseph, I would say—and a bit on the suspicious side. "And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth, that she called unto the men of her house, and spake unto them, saying, See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice"—hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. That's the proper commentary on that—"and it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled, and got him out. "And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me; that his wrath was kindled. And Joseph's master took him, and put him into prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison."

Well, that sort of sucks. First his brothers betray him, and throw him in a pit. Then he gets made a slave—which is probably better than being in the pit—and then he becomes kind of like king-slave, so that's working out pretty well. Now, someone lies about him; he gets betrayed again, and it's into prison with him. So it's Sisyphus—up with the rock, then down. Order, chaos, order chaos. You have to think, 'well, are you the order, are you the chaos, or are you the thing that's moving between?' That's the right thing to be. Otherwise, you're just order, and that's a really bad idea. Or you're just chaos, and that's a really bad idea. You can be the thing that's dynamically mediating between them, and that's what

he's doing.

"But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison."

That's no easy thing to do, I would think: you're thrown in prison, and now the jailer likes you. How exactly are you going to manage that? It's a good thing to think about. If you were really in dire straits, how is it that you should conduct yourself, so that you have the highest probability of having things work out? It's not saying, 'well, Joseph took over the thumbscrew, and started using that on the other prisoners.' That's not the indication, here, at all; it's that he's acting like a person who isn't a prisoner, even though he's in the prison—just like he was acting like someone who wasn't a slave, when he was a slave. It makes you wonder who you could be, despite the fact that other people think that you're whatever you appear to be.

"And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper."

It's a repeat of exactly what happened when he was the slave of the Pharaoh, except it's one rung deeper into hell, so to speak. It was slave for Pharaoh, and here it's prisoner for jail master. But it doesn't matter. The same thing happens.

So now he's in prison, and the Pharaoh has a fit, one day, and throws the chief of his butlers into prison, and the chief of his bakers. Each of them has a dream, and Joseph interprets the dreams. It seems to be something that he can do. He tells the butler that his dream means that Pharaoh is going to forgive him and put him back in his position. He tells the baker that the Pharaoh isn't going to forgive him, and that he's going to take off his head and hang him in a tree, which is a rather rough dream. But that's what happens. So, anyways, the butler goes free, and Joseph says, 'look, maybe you could just keep in mind the fact that I did you a bit of a favour, here, and told you something that was accurate.' But the chief didn't really remember, once he was freed.

Now the Pharaoh has a dream. He actually has two dreams, so it's another of those double motifs. The idea is that these are really important dreams, because they came in a pair.

"And, behold, there came up out of the river seven well favoured kine and fatfleshed"—cattle—"and they fed in a meadow. And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill favoured and leanfleshed; and stood by the other kine upon the brink of the river. And the ill favoured and leanfleshed kine did eat up the seven well favoured"—and then he has another dream, to hit it home. "And he slept and dreamed the second time: and, behold, seven ears of corn came up upon one stalk, rank and good. And, behold, seven thin ears and blasted with the east wind sprung up after them. And the seven thin ears devoured the seven rank and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and, behold, it was a dream...And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass."

It's interesting. One of the better theories about dreams is that they're part of the way that the right and the left hemisphere communicate—or, maybe, the nonverbal part of the brain communicating with the verbal part of the brain. The nonverbal part of the brain, which is less differentiated, and which thinks more globally, is looking for patterns and anomalies in the world—things that don't fit well with the current way of conceptualizing the world; things that make you anxious and uncertain. Those are things you haven't mastered, so they don't fit well into your conceptualization of the world, by definition. If you had mastered them, they wouldn't make you anxious and nervous. The nonverbal parts of your brain are like an alarm system—they're looking around for places where you're probably wrong. Then they put those in images, and try to conceptualize them, so that you can update your model of reality, to take them into account. But that also produces a fair bit of negative emotion—especially at night.

So we know, if you deprive people of dreams, they go insane very rapidly—animals, as well. It's a necessary part of mental equilibrium. If you have rats that you want to drive insane, this is how you do it: You put the rat on a pedestal that's pretty small and surrounded by water. When he falls asleep, his nose hits the water, and then he wakes up. So you can deprive the rat of sleep. The rats don't respond to that very well, after some period of time. That's one of the ways that that's been discovered.

Anyways, the dream does seem to be an update mechanism. If you have a very powerful dream, like a nightmare—especially if it's repeating—it's like something is trying to hammer on the door, that needs to be let in. Often, you don't know how to let it in. That's a problem.

"Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph"—because he had talked to his butler



—"and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh." I guess he didn't want to shock Pharaoh with how people dressed in a prison. "And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it. And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

So Joseph isn't taking credit for his ability to interpret dreams—which also indicates that, despite the fact that he's successful and competent, he's not narcissistic. If he happens to have this gift, he regards it as a gift, and not as something that redounds to his favour; it's just something that he happens to be able to do. That's a hallmark of someone who's got a pretty well-put-together personality, as far as I'm concerned.

People have gifts that they didn't really earn—that would be your talents, your intelligence, your good looks, et cetera—and there's no sense in being all puffed up about that. It's great; it's luck of the draw, though. The proper attitude is to note that it's luck of the draw, and to be grateful for it.

It's quite a fine painting, that one. "Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt: and there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land; and the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it shall be very grievous."

So now we see that Joseph is the sort of person who can look into the future. This is sort of what Adam was called on to do, when he got kicked out of the Garden of Paradise. You're going to be able to conceptualize that, even if things are going well now, that doesn't mean that they're going to go well into the future. So he's the ant, and not the grasshopper, right? In the [grasshopper and the ant story](#), everything's good—but you should wake the hell up, and you should test to see how things can go wrong, and see if your systems can survive things going wrong. This is something that we could all harken to, because I think we do a very bad job, in the modern world, of testing to see if our systems could go wrong.

Ok, so the Pharaoh's pretty impressed by this dream interpretation, and pretty worried about it. I guess he's a pretty reasonable person, despite the fact that he put Joseph in jail. I guess he didn't have much choice.

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"Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land"—this is what Joseph is saying—"and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities." And, just like that, Joseph is restored to his position.

"And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."

Joseph comes out of the prison, and he really—as far as I'm concerned—occupies a position that's higher than the position of Pharaoh. It depends on how you look at it, because the Pharaoh has relegated himself to ceremonial status. Joseph has all the responsibility, and he makes all the decisions. De facto, he's the Pharaoh. He doesn't get the glory, precisely—although, he's not doing too bad for himself. There's a lesson in that, too.

I wrote [these rules for Quora](#), a long time ago. I've written some of them into this book, that you guys got a pamphlet about, today. One of the rules that I didn't write about was, 'note that opportunity lurks where responsibility has been abdicated,' which is really interesting, I think. I mean, people say things like, 'well, the guy I work with doesn't do any work.' It's like, 'well, you could do it.' I know there are limits to that, but one of the things you can do at work is make yourself indispensable. You might get the Cain types against you, if you do that. But there's something to be said for being indispensable: when people start to be dispensed with, you probably won't be one of them—or, even if you are, the fact that you're indispensable just means you can go somewhere else and be indispensable, there. That's just as useful. So it's very, very difficult to permanently put down someone who's really good at doing things, because they can just go off and do them somewhere else. One of the ways you get like that is to take responsibility when someone else is failing to do so. You think, 'well, I shouldn't have to do that.' That's one way of thinking about it. Another way of thinking about it is, 'oh, good—I get to do that.'

"And the seven years of plenteousness, that was in the land of Egypt, were ended. And the seven years of dearth began to come, according as Joseph had said: and the dearth was in all lands."

That's an archetypal story, right? It's the business cycle story. It's a little harsher

That's an archetypal story, right? It's the business cycle story. It's a little harsher when you're starving, obviously, but that's not the point. The point is that sometimes things are getting good, and sometimes things are getting bad. You can be sure that's the case; that's going to happen to you. The wise person takes stock of the fact that things are going to get bad. This is the same thing that happens with Noah. It's like, 'assume the flood!' because it's going to happen. You think, 'it's a hell of a world, that has floods.' Well, not if you have a boat, right? It helps a lot, if you have a boat during a flood. You can float on the flood, and then it's not such a problem.

If you refuse to look at the fact that things are going to be going downhill, badly, and that you're going to be in a pit at one point—you and your family, perhaps—then, when it happens, it will be as bad as it can possibly be. But, if you're awake and alert to that possibility, then you can mitigate it.

"And the dearth was in all lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do. And the famine was over all the face of the earth: and Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold unto the Egyptians; and the famine waxed sore in the land of Egypt. And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands. "Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another? And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die." It's pretty straightforward advice, that. "And Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt. But Benjamin, Joseph's brother"—so that's the youngest one; the only one younger than Joseph, and also Rachel's other son—"Jacob sent not with his brethren; for he said, Lest peradventure mischief befall him." So that kind of indicates, to me, that Jacob was a bit suspicious about what had happened to Joseph—the last time he sent all the brothers on an adventure. "And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth."

Well, there's the dream. One question you have in your life is, who should you bow down to? You might say, 'no one.' That's not exactly the right answer, because that means that you don't have an ideal—because you bow down to an ideal. That's what makes it an ideal. If you don't have an ideal, then what the hell are you going to do? So you have to bow down to something. And so what

happens, here, is that the brothers are bowing down to the person who's so bloody resilient and competent that they can take themselves out of a prison and become ruler of a land.

That happened to [Václav Havel](#), in Czechoslovakia. It also happened to [Mandela](#), in South Africa. These things actually happen. It's really something. God only knows what you might learn in prison. So they bow down to Joseph, and properly so. Even without his coat, he's still the person with the coat of many colours.

"And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them"—a number of years have passed—"and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food. And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him.

"And they came unto Jacob their father unto the land of Canaan, and told him all that befell unto them; saying, The man, who is the lord of the land, spake roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country. And we said unto him, We are true men; we are no spies: we be twelve brethren, sons of our father; one is not, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan. "And the man, the lord of the country, said unto us, Hereby shall I know that ye are true men; leave one of your brethren here with me, and take food for the famine of your households, and be gone: and bring your youngest brother unto me: then shall I know that ye are no spies, but that ye are true men: so will I deliver you your brother, and ye shall traffick in the land." So that they won't starve to death. "And it came to pass as they emptied their sacks, that, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack: and when both they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid."

So they had bought food from Joseph, and he gave them the food, and he put all their money back in their sacks—which, I can imagine, would worry them, to some degree.

"And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me. And Reuben spake unto his father, saying, Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again. And Jacob said, My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave."

What happens in the last part of the Joseph story is associated with the idea of putting your individual house in order, and then putting your family's house in order, let's say. It's reversed a little bit, in this story, because Joseph puts himself together, and then he puts the state of Egypt in order—which is really quite interesting, because Egypt is the canonical tyranny, in the Old Testament. So the idea—very, very clear, here—is that the person who wears the coat of many colours can put the tyranny right. And then, the next extension is, well, he has to put his family right. Now, generally, the progression would be to put yourself right, and then put your family right, and then put the state right. Something like that. If you can do it in a different order, that's probably ok, too.

So that's what happens, at the end of the story: Joseph is doing pretty damn well, and so is the state that he serves. But that isn't good enough for him: he wants his family to be functional, and put together properly, even though they did terrible things to him. That's very interesting, because, once someone does terrible things to you, then the logical thing—or a logical thing—to think is, 'well, go to hell in a handbasket. You deserve exactly what you get.' But it's not a very productive attitude, especially if you're around people that you have to be around. If it's your family, and you have a family dinner, and one of you punched the other, and the other punches you back, and that's like the family dinner for the next 30 years, it doesn't seem to be very productive, even if you're the person who happened to get in the last blow. You're going to have to put up with them, at minimum. It might be nice to just let what you can go, go, and work towards making things better. You have to get rid of the idea of revenge, resentment, and all those things that you carry along. But it's probably better to think about how your family could be if it was really functioning well, and to just aim unerringly at that.

I know that's not easy. I mean, people are very screwy, and there's no end to the depths of pathologies within families. This story states that very clearly. They tried to kill him, and they sold him into slavery. It's a pathological family; let's put it that way. But Joseph's attitude is, 'well, we gotta set this right.' Not least because of his father, but it isn't only because of his father—as you'll see, as the story unfolds.

"And the famine was sore in the land. And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the corn which they had brought out of Egypt, their father said unto them, Go again, buy us a little food. And Judah spake unto him, saying, The man did solemnly protest unto us, saying, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother

solemnly protest unto us, saying, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you." They can't go back to Egypt without Benjamin. "And they said, The man asked us straitly of our state, and of our kindred, saying, Is your father yet alive? have ye another brother? and we told him according to the tenor of these words: could we certainly know that he would say, Bring your brother down? And Judah said unto Israel his father, Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones. I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever."

So Judah, who played a pretty dismal role in the original selling of Joseph into slavery, seems to, obviously, have learned something, by this point, since he's willing to put himself on the line to take responsibility for this situation, and to stand in for Benjamin. So he's making himself into a sacrificial object, of sorts.

The game that Joseph's playing—he's sort of teasing his brothers, but he's also testing them. The game he's playing is twofold. One is, 'have you bloody well learned anything, or as you just as corrupt and useless as you were before?' That's game number one. Game number two is, 'maybe if I poke and prod you, a put you into a relatively difficult and mysterious situation, I can get you to clue the hell in, and adopt some responsibility, and we can move this whole mess forward.' So that seems to be happening. Judah is taking responsibility. Reuben did that, as well. "And the men took presents, and they took double money in their hand and Benjamin; and rose up, and went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph. And when Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the ruler of his house, Bring these men home, and slay, and make ready; for these men shall dine with me at noon. And the man did as Joseph bade; and the man brought the men into Joseph's house. "And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house, and bowed themselves to him to the earth. And he asked them of their welfare, and said, Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive? And they answered, Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive. And they bowed down their heads, and made obeisance. "And he lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me? And he said, God be gracious unto thee, my son. And Joseph made haste; for his bowels did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there. And he washed his face, and went out, and refrained himself, and said, Set on bread. "And they sat before him." Now he plays another trick on his brothers. He has them all sit at the table, but he lines them up according to age. He's trying to freak them out, fundamentally. And he

manages that, because they have no idea how in the world he could possibly pull something like that off. They think it's magic: "and the men marvelled one at another. And he took and sent messes unto them from before him: but Benjamin's mess was five times so much as any of their's."

So, what's the doing? Well, he's testing his brothers, again. The fact that Joseph, as a child, got more, meant that his brothers got terribly jealous, and then murderous. Now he's doing the same thing with Benjamin. He's thinking, 'ok, I'll give this kid more than his share, and I'll watch how these reprobates behave, and see if they've learned anything.'

"And he commanded the steward of his house, saying, Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put every man's money in his sack's mouth. And put my cup, the silver cup, in the sack's mouth of the youngest, and his corn money. And he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken. As soon as the morning was light, the men were went away, they and their asses."

The cup is found in Benjamin's sack. Benjamin's kind of young, and Joseph sends out people, to find out where the cup has gone. They find it in Benjamin's sack. They're very upset about this. They said that a harsh punishment would befall whoever had the cup in his sack.

"Then they rent their clothes, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city. And Judah and his brethren came to Joseph's house; for he was yet there: and they fell before him on the ground"—very unhappy and apologetic. "And Joseph said unto them, What deed is this that ye have done? wot ye not that such a man as I can certainly divine?" He's saying, 'I know what's going on.' "And Judah said, What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we are my lord's servants, both we, and he also with whom the cup is found. And he said, God forbid that I should do so: but the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant; and as for you, get you up in peace unto your father. "Now therefore when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us; seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life; it shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die: and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave. For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever. "Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren. For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be

and go up with his brethren. For now shall I go up to my father, and the Lord be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father."

Ok, so what's happened? Well, they learned their lesson. Now Judah, again, is willing to stand in the place of Benjamin, and become a slave himself. Now Joseph has determined that his brothers have developed their character to the point where reconciliation might be possible.

It says you should forgive and forget, but the conditions for that are quite specific. If you have a dispute with someone—they've wronged you, in some sense—and they apologize, the question is, well, what's the apology? Well, it's a layout of a rationale. It's something like, 'as far as I can tell, here's the reasons I did this horrible thing, and here's what I've learned from it, and here's what I'm going to do, to try not to do it again. Would you give me another crack at it?' That's the proper repentance. And then you forgive, because you're an idiot, too, and you'll probably do something stupid, and maybe you'd like the same kind of break, at some point—and besides, if we all held each other completely to account, at all possible times, for everything, it would just be hopeless. There'd be no room for error.

The forgiveness which Joseph is showing is wise forgiveness. He's not going to put himself out on the line for people who haven't learned, so that the same stupid thing can happen again—so they can continue to spread misery wherever they go. He's going to find out if they've clued in a little bit. If so, they can move on with putting the family together. And so that breaks him up: "then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.

"And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence." Understatement of the decade, there. "And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. "So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: and thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and



thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: and there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty."

There's a bread hint, here. What's the most reliable source of bread? Well, it isn't bread itself. It's whatever it is that gives rise to bread. That's what Joseph is, in this story: he's the force that gives rise to nourishment. Joseph is often considered a type of Christ, which means a precursor, in some sense. That's one way of thinking about it. You can see that echoed, right there. What do you store up for famine? You store up character. That's the best way through. Now, that doesn't mean that you don't also store up bread.

"And they went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father, and told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not. And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived: and Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die. "And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Issac. And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I. And he said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation." So that's how the Israelites end up in Egypt. "I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes. And Jacob rose up from Beersheba: and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, and their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him."

So the family's all united in the proper state of being that Joseph has arranged. It's so interesting, too, because Joseph is a foreigner, as well as being a former slave and prisoner. Foreigner, slave, and prisoner, and yet he ends up ruling Egypt—sheerly because of the force of his character and competence. That's really something to think about. The story is that there isn't anything stronger than that. It doesn't matter what the circumstances are; there isn't a force that's more powerful than that. And I don't think that's naive. In fact, I think it's the exact opposite of naive. No matter where you are, you can generally make things better, if that's what you want to do—unless you're in a place that's hell itself. That, usually, is something that elevates you, and elevates the people around you. You can do that wherever you are because there isn't a place that's so

you. You can do that, wherever you are, because there isn't a place that's so small that you can't do that. That's the message of the prison.

"And they took their cattle, and their goods, which they had gotten in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob, and all his seed with him.

"And he sent Judah before him unto Joseph, to direct his face unto Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen. And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive. "And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: the land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle." He gives them a job. "And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh."

That's a very interesting turn of events, because you'd expect the opposite, under those circumstances. It appears that Jacob was a man of relatively great self-possession, because you wouldn't bless Queen Elizabeth, in all likelihood, unless you had a lot of gall.

"And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh. And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions therein, and grew, and multiplied exceedingly. And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years: so the whole age of Jacob was an hundred forty and seven years. "And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: but I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their buryingplace. And he said, I will do as thou hast said. And it came to pass after these things, that one told Joseph, Behold, thy father is sick: and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And one told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed. "And Israel said unto Joseph, I had

not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed. And Joseph brought them out from between his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand towards Israel's right hand, and brought them near unto him. "And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn. And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head. "And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head. And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations."

Another repeat of the same thing that happens, continually. When God wants to intervene in human affairs, what he does is invert tradition. It's something like that. That's a sign that there's something new and special going on, and that gives precedence to the younger child, rather than the older child—precedence to what's new, rather than what's traditional. Of course, sometimes, that's necessary, because tradition is insufficient. Sometimes, something new has to come into being, to update it.

"And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days. Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father."

I'm not going to go through all of these. The story gets quite interesting, here, because Jacob blesses Joseph's sons before he blesses his own sons. So what he's doing is placing the rights of the firstborn into the sons of his favourite son—and then he goes to his sons. So that has implications for the way the Biblical stories lay themselves out from thenceforward.

"Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch." You may remember that Reuben slept with his father's concubine. Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations." What happened with Simeon and Levi was that somebody lay with their sister, Dinah, and then offered to marry her, and then became circumcised

—because that was part of the deal—and then had all of their men circumcised. Simeon and Levi went in, when they were recovering, and killed them all. Jacob and all his people had to leave because, well, that irritated their relatives.

"Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

"Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: the archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel.) "Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: the blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren. "All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them."

What we see, here, is an echo, in some sense, of what happens in the Mesopotamian creation story. In the Mesopotamian creation story, the dragon of chaos, [Tiamat](#), and her consort, [Apsu](#)—freshwater and saltwater, respectively—are mingled together. That combination of chaos and order gives rise to the first assembly of the ancient gods. The ancient gods kill Apsu, casually and foolishly, and enrage Tiamat with their foolishness and ignorance. She comes back with a vengeance. In the meantime, she produces a huge army of monsters, and she puts [Kingu](#), the worst of the monsters, at its head. She decides that she's going to take out her creation. So that's a little warning, from 3,000 years ago, about foolishly undermining your tradition.

Anyways, the gods and their friends go out, and they try to fight against Tiamat. They come back with their tails between their legs, continually. But then a new God appears on the scene, and that's [Marduk](#). He's got eyes all the way around his head, and he can speak words of magic. They know that there's something new about this newest God, with his capacity for vision and articulate speech. So they say, 'why don't you go out, and try to deal with the chaos?' Marduk says, 'yeah, ok. No problem. But here's the deal: you elect me top God, and now I determine the destiny of the world.'

They're desperate because Tiamat is coming to get them—that's chaos—with the worst of all possible monsters. They're probably thinking that he's not going to win, anyways. So they agree, and out he goes. He confronts Tiamat, who's the Goddess of chaos, and he cuts her into pieces, and he makes the world out of the pieces. One of his names is 'he who who makes ingenious things out of the combat with Tiamat,' which is so interesting. That's such a remarkable bit of nomenclature.

So who should be at the pinnacle? The force that sees, speaks, and voluntarily goes out to confront chaos. You know how many years it took people to figure that out? That's like the pinnacle discovery of humanity. That's what that is. It's echoed, here. Simeon and Levi are too angry. The other brothers all have flaws and faults, of various sorts. They're not elevated to the highest place. But Joseph, because he has his coat of many colours, and because he lands on his feet no matter where he goes, and because he's not resentful, bitter, malevolent, and genocidal, and he's not shaking his fist at the sky—or yelling at God because of Trump, let's say—is the right representative of the 12 tribes. That's brilliant. It's a brilliant story.

"All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them. And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons"—so it's the last thing he does. He knows that these are the 12 tribes that will progress into the future of his people. The last thing he does is try to hierarchically organize their relative virtues, as an indication of what has been learned.

"And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people. And Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him. And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father: and the physicians embalmed Israel

physicians embalmed Israel.

"And when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spake unto the house of Pharaoh, saying, If now I have found grace in your eyes, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, My father made me swear, saying, Lo, I die: in my grave which I have digged for me in the land of Canaan, there shalt thou bury me. Now therefore let me go up, I pray thee, and bury my father, and I will come again. And Pharaoh said, Go up, and bury thy father, according as he made thee swear. "For his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a buryingplace of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre. And Joseph returned into Egypt, he, and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father. And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him. "And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin"—pretty snivelly, really—"for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him. And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants. "And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them." The idea, there, is that there's no evil so evil that good cannot triumph over it. "And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father's house: and Joseph lived an hundred and ten years. And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation: the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were brought up upon Joseph's knees. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt."

And that's Genesis. Thank you all for persevering. Thank you. This has been very worthwhile, as far as I'm concerned. I've learned an awful lot. I'm very much looking forward to continuing with it. Thank you all very much for your support, and your rapt attention, and your seriousness in this endeavour, and

your care, and all of that. It's really been a privilege to be able to do this. It's a completely surreal thing to manage. So far, I think about 5 million people have watched it. That seems to be a very good thing.

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